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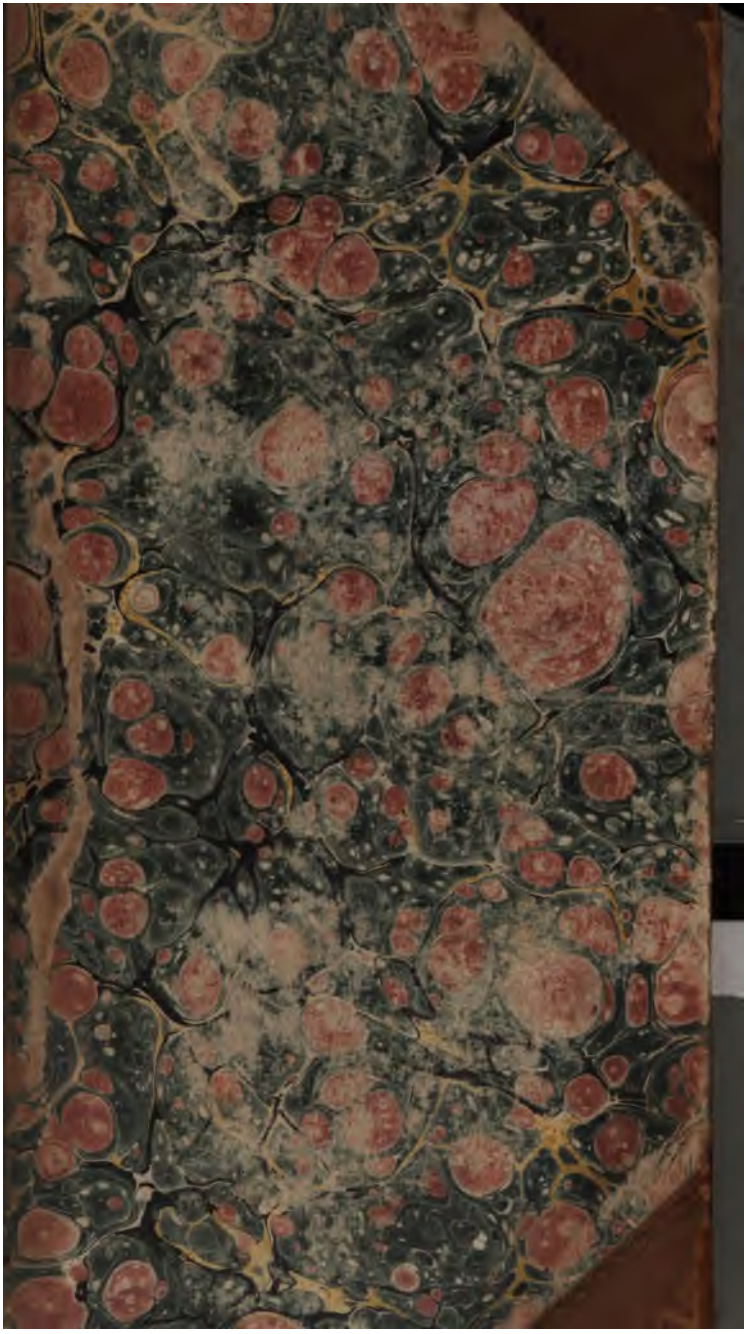

DISCOURSES

ON THE

DUTIES AND CONSOLATIONS

OF

THE AGED.

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DISCOURSES

S.A. 1827.

ON THE

DUTIES AND CONSOLATIONS

OF

THE AGED.

By HENRY BELFRAGE, D.D.
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, FALKIRK,
AUTHOR OF "A MONITOR TO FAMILIES," &c.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.
PROV. xvi. 31.

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PREFACE.

To the work now submitted to the world the Author was led by his former publications. It has been suggested to him, from various quarters, that a volume of Discourses to the Aged would be a suitable appendage to his Monitor to Families and to his Sermons to the Young; and the kind reception with which these books have been honoured has encouraged him in the present effort.

To the admonition of the aged some ancient moralists directed the lessons of wisdom and the power of classic eloquence; nor has this topic been neglected by the ministers of the gospel; and, while we admire the ingenuity and the beauty with which some of the heathen sages have descanted on the virtues and the solace of age, we feel the peculiar advantage which the Christian teacher hath in his counsels, arising from the examples of the Bible, the extent of its morality, the riches of its grace, and the brightness of its hopes. Mr Orton's Discourses to the Aged are marked by practical good sense and enlightened piety; and the Sermons of the late Dr Lawson discover that acquaintance with the Scriptures, and that simplicity, mingling with holy wisdom, by which that venerable man was distinguished. But in this field there is ample scope for new labourers; and it was the Author's impression that there were various characters, promises, and ad-

monitions in the Bible, as well fitted for the benefit of the old as any which had been handled; and that, on subjects already discussed, experience and study might furnish every reflecting man with new illustrations. It was not his object to write a formal treatise on the duties and the consolations of the aged; nor has he attempted to specify all that might be necessary or useful to them. He has selected such topics as appeared most suitable, and has endeavoured to present these in the mode which he thought would be most interesting. He has tried to combine encouragement with duty, to warn against the evils by which old age is imbittered, and to excite to those exercises by which it is adorned and blessed. He is aware that there is a minuteness in illustration not common in sermons; but he trusts it will not be considered as of the cast which degrades holy admonition, or as offensive to a refined taste. To be useful there must, in such discourses, be a particularity in our counsels and lessons. General declamation is never applied to himself by any individual.

If, by these discourses, God shall be pleased to brighten to any old man the evening of life, to make him more useful in his narrowing circle, more amiable to those whose esteem and respect are of so much importance to his comfort, more detached from the world in spite of increasing efforts to strengthen its cords, and more fit for eternity, into which he is about to enter, he will rejoice in the kindness of that mercy which blesses the humblest efforts of the willing mind for his people's good.

FALKIRK, *Dec.* 18*th*, 1826.

CONTENTS.

		Page
I.	The Minister's charge to the Aged. Titus ii. 1—5...	1
II.	An Old Disciple. Acts xxi. 16	27
III.	The Character of Barzillai. 2 Samuel xix. 34—37....	46
IV.	The Claims of Widows. 1 Timothy v. 3.....	67
V.	The best Support in Frailty. Isaiah xlvi. 4.....	92
VI.	The Nearness of Salvation a Motive to Vigilance.—Romans xiii. 11.....	115
VII.	The Conversion of an aged Transgressor. 2 Chronicles xxxiii. 12, 13.....	141
VIII.	The Benediction of the Aged. Genesis xlviii. 15, 16	166
IX.	The Effects of Cheerfulness and of Despondency.—Proverbs xvii. 22.....	193
X.	Lost Opportunities deplored. Jeremiah viii. 20.....	215
XI.	The Testimony of Christian Experience. Mark v. 18, 19.....	237
XII.	The Character and Exercise of aged Simeon. Luke ii. 25—30.....	262
XIII.	On Patience. James i. 4.....	286
XIV.	The Last Warning. Daniel v. 25—28.....	308
XV.	The Lessons and Duties of Winter. John x. 22.....	338
XVI.	The Character and Privilege of Caleb. Numbers xiv. 24	362
XVII.	The Feelings suited to our Last Sacrament. Matthew xxvi. 29.....	389
XVIII.	The Limits of Life. Psalm xc. 10.....	413
XIX.	Dying Reflections of an aged Saint. 2. Timothy iv. 7	433
XX.	Dying Prospects of an aged Saint. 2. Timothy iv. 8	455

removed from their present opportunities of instruction, should make the ministers of the Gospel employ, with peculiar diligence, every means of promoting their spiritual welfare; and to such admonitions the old should listen as to the last counsels of a friend, and implore that divine influence which will seal them on the heart.

In this discourse I shall explain the temper and conduct which are to be maintained by the aged, and shall then call your attention to the charge of the Apostle as to the inculcating of them.

1. Let us then consider the temper and conduct which are to be maintained by the aged.—In stating the duties of aged men, Paul requires, in the first place, that they be sober. The word thus rendered properly signifies watchful; and vigilance is most necessary for the aged. They must watch over their tempers, that they may not, by peevishness or fretfulness, give uneasiness to their friends, or impair the affection with which they wish the young to regard them. They must watch over their affections, that they may not be engrossed by worldly wealth; they must watch over their conversation, that it be instructive, suitable, and agreeable; and they must watch over their conduct; for indiscretions and follies which would scarcely be censured in the young will be condemned in them with severity. They must watch over the interests of their connexions, and warn them with prudence and affection against every thing which seems to them calculated to be injurious. The limited sphere in which they now move, and their dependence on others for their knowledge of what is pass-

ing in the world, unfits them for expressing much interest in matters of public concernment, and should quicken their zeal in their private circle to provoke to love and to good works.

Old age is a season in which little is enjoyed of that sound sleep which is experienced in the earlier period of life. Solomon beautifully says of the old man, that he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and this should be a monitor to him of that holy vigilance which he ought to maintain, and which is so peculiarly suitable in one to whom death is so near, and who hath so soon to give an account of himself to God.

Old men must be grave. They must avoid all that is fantastic in their apparel. To see the aged aping the fashionable attire of the young is most ridiculous. At the same time, all singularity in dress should be avoided which is unsuited to their circumstances, or which will be offensive or disgusting to those with whom they associate. Pride, selfishness, and folly prompt to such peculiarities. They must avoid, too, all levity of behaviour. The giggling of the young we may excuse, because it proceeds from a hilarity of spirit which time will soon repress; but when we see it in age we are disposed to ascribe it to incorrigible folly. Frothy language and vain boasting are also most unsuitable in age. The things of which they vaunt are what once attracted applause, but have long since passed away, and of which sober reflection should have taught them the emptiness. In looking back on a long life, so many faults must rise before the view, that, instead of self-admiration, the old man must see the strongest reason for self-abhorrence, and feel that his only re-

fuge is in God's superabounding grace. This gravity is quite different from that sourness and austerity which hath sometimes assumed its name; for there is in it a calmness and softness which renders it lovely; and while we turn with disgust from the pert levity of the fool, and the dark scowl of the misanthrope, we mark with pleasure the mild solemnity of the serious. Old men must be temperate. There are few old men who are addicted to excess in eating, but some of them are addicted to drunkenness. Intemperance shocks us when we see it in youth. Ah, how painful is it to see the engaging qualities and fair prospects of the young destroyed by sensuality! But it is still more hideous in the old: their faculties are failing, and why should they hasten their decay by excess? The last sands are running down the glass, and why should they shake it to quicken their fall? If it is said by any, that they take this indulgence to keep away painful reflections on past follies and evils, they may be assured that they will return in a more severe form in their serious hours, and it would be infinitely better to mitigate them by the salutary workings of penitence and devotion. Consider how fresh is the countenance, how firm the nerve, and how vigorous the step of the sober old man, and how different is his appearance from that of the shattered and wasted sensualist! Think how he is agitated by nervous tremours, and what objects horrible to the fancy and the heart seem to him to be gathering around him. Whatever terms of ridicule may be applied to such a state of body and mind, the considerate will see in it

the wreck of health, peace, and sanity,—the dreadful result of habitual intemperance.

The lecherous old man is the most loathsome of all objects; and few are able to endure the impurity of his conversation, or the brutality of his habits.

Old men must be sound in faith. Having adopted, after due inquiry and full conviction, their religious principles, they must hold them fast. How disrespectable is it in an old man to be the dupe of every new speculation that is set afloat! and how unhappy is it for himself when he abandons principles which have been the consolation of his life, for the dreams of empty pretenders to superior intelligence or to superior piety! It may be expected confidently of you, that you henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. In our day, the unseemly spectacle has been seen of some old men adopting the notions of the wildest visionaries, and puffed up by the idea that they are distinguishing themselves for liberal opinions; and of others practising the most foolish innovations in worship, as if they were the most valuable improvements.

It may not be improper to remark, that many of the aged are blameable for the opposition which they give to what are real improvements, for the vehemence with which they contend for things which the progress of refinement calls upon us to put away, and for the anger which they express because others are gratified while their humours are disregarded. Humility, wisdom, and benevolence, would lead them

cheerfully to acquiesce in whatever is calculated to interest the young in religious services, though to them the usages to which they have been accustomed would be more acceptable.

The old must be sound also in the grace of faith, believing firmly in the wisdom and goodness of the divine administration, in spite of all the suggestions of fear, and relying steadfastly on the atonement, amidst all the sad remembrances of the sins of a long life.

Old men must also be sound in charity. Their love to God must not wax cold amidst the decline of the faculties, but near as they are to the place where he is seen as he is, the pious affections should be stronger than ever. What a blessing to old age is the perfect love which casteth out fear! Their experience of the treachery and of the wickedness of the world must not harden their hearts to their fellow-creatures; but they must labour to be useful in a sphere which they are soon to leave, and which they will soon have neither opportunity nor power to benefit. How beautiful is that love to Christ which fills them with a desire to depart and to be with him, as what is far better than remaining in this vain world, and that love to man which triumphs over all the cold and selfish feelings which age so often produces! In such an old man we see a striking proof of the statement of the Apostle, "Charity never faileth." There is a love in word and in tongue which is seldom the character of age. It is not from the lips of the old that we anticipate the language of flattery, or those complimentary phrases which are too often the incentives to vanity or

the instruments of deceit; yet let them not, from an aversion to such communications, pride themselves in using terms which offend by their coarseness or familiarity.

The aged can now do little in active charity; but they should manifest their benevolence in their counsels and prayers, and, where their circumstances admit of it, in their donations and bequests for promoting the interests of piety and humanity. It is in utility alone that you will secure to your name a valuable memorial.

Old men must be sound in patience. They must not only have the show of it occasionally, but their patience must be uniform and steady. They must be tranquil amidst the infirmities of age, and steadfast under every species of persecution. They must not fret on account of the neglect which they may experience from those from whom they anticipated unwearied attention. Young persons are peculiarly alive to every thing that bears the appearance of coldness or inattention; but the aged, from their experience of the vanity of human friendship, should be less affected with it. It is, no doubt, painful to them that they have not that refreshment in sleep, that enjoyment in conversation, or that pleasure in reading, which they once had; but they ought to be thankful that they were favoured with all these for a long course of years, and that their senses of hearing and of seeing have not totally failed them. It is a beautiful instance of the benignity of Providence, that such aids have been devised for these failing senses of age, and otal loss of both is so seldom associated.

They must wait with patience for the promised good. The wishes of the young are eager and passionate, and they often bring misery upon themselves by the ardour which they put forth to attain the objects on which their hearts are set; but aged saints know that it is good to wait, and quietly to hope for the salvation of the Lord. How unseemly in age are the passionate longings of childhood, or the indiscreet vehemence of youth! You have little left you to wish for in this world, and as to it you should believe that it will come in the best season; and with regard to another world, you should, like the ancient patriarchs, "die in the faith, persuaded of the promises and embracing them, and confessing yourselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth." *

2. The Apostle states the peculiar duties of aged women. They must be in behaviour as becometh holiness, have such a conversation as is suited to the religion which they profess, and as will demonstrate their connexion with the holy Redeemer. Every thing which indicates, or which is assimilated to the spirit of the devil, they must carefully avoid. In the times of gross ignorance and superstition, an aged woman, if austere in her manners or lonely in her situation, was suspected of a commerce with Satan; every disaster in the neighbourhood was attributed to her malignant influence,—the most ridiculous stories were circulated and believed as to the appearances she had assumed, and the powers she had exercised; her approach was never seen, nor her dwelling passed by, without fear and horror, and the most shocking

* Heb. xi. 13.

cruelties were sometimes inflicted on her, not merely by vulgar prejudice, but under the form of law. Such scenes we now think of with shame at human folly and credulity, and rejoice in that spread of light and liberality which has expunged such laws from our statute-books, and such notions from every mind but the mind that is sunk in ignorance and brutality. But there are features of the character of Satan which mark the characters of some, and which, though less repulsive than the attributes of superstition, are most injurious to the welfare of society.

Against one of these vices the Apostle charges Titus to direct his first caution. Aged women must be admonished not to be false accusers. The word thus rendered is the one commonly employed to designate the devil, who is emphatically styled the accuser of the brethren. This is an idea which should render backbiting and detraction peculiarly hateful. Aged females have been sometimes represented as prone to severe censure of others, and especially of the young, on whose levities they are disposed to look with no indulgent eye; and sometimes harsh language has been employed by them with regard to the faults of others, because they supposed it would be considered as an indication of their own strict and superior virtue. Nothing can be more absurd than this idea; for the purest and best of characters have always been distinguished for candour and mercy. Experience might have taught them the folly and injustice of precipitate judgments. Every aged person may recollect instances in which he has suffered himself, or made others to suffer, by rash conclusions.

It is most improper in the old to encourage the tale-bearer to come near them, or to entertain their visitors with injurious reflections on the manners and conduct of their younger relatives. Some old people have been tempted to do this by learning that these relatives were accustomed to complain to their visitors of the fatiguing attention they required, and of the difficulty they felt in bearing with their fretfulness, and repelling their dictation; but, in such circumstances, it is their wisdom to amend what is offensive, and not to render evil for evil.

Let them give that view of those around them which is demanded by candour and charity. This is best suited to the gentleness which becomes their sex, and to the consideration which becomes their age. It is strange to see those who have so many years of sin to look back on and to deplore, condemning others with severity for a single fault. To those who are so near the tribunal of God, that caution applies with peculiar force, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned."*

Aged females must also be sober. Excessive indulgence of their bodily appetites must be shunned, as degrading both to themselves and to their profession. In men, intemperance is bad; but in a female it is shocking, as being so inconsistent with the delicacy of the sex. Nothing can lower an aged female more in the estimation of her relatives and neighbours, than this habit. What respect will be paid to the opinion or wishes of one thus besotted, or how can

* Luke vi. 37.

the young look up with deference to age which intoxication renders ridiculous? The perverse things then uttered will be remembered in contrast with the sagest counsels, and fooleries then practised will be the apology for every youthful indiscretion. It is indeed a most lamentable fact, that the excesses of aged persons have destroyed the horror felt by their younger relatives at this vice, and have been copied by them, to the misery of their families.

The abhorrence which every virtuous female will feel for this sin is strikingly expressed in the language of Hannah, in reply to the rash imputation of it to her by Eli: "Count not thine hand-maid for a daughter of Belial." To give softening epithets to this sin, or to frame apologies for indulging in it, discovers a spirit very different from that which represents it as the leading character of a child of the devil. Aged females must also be teachers of good things. In his epistle to Timothy, Paul speaks of old wives fables; and some aged females have delighted to set before the young, the legends of superstition, and tales founded on fiction, or embellished by their own fancy, curious rites of the olden time, or the favourite ballads of their youth. These can serve no purpose but to pervert the imagination, and to enslave the minds of the young. Many a child has through life felt the influence of these lessons of the nursery, or has learned to mingle its valuable counsels with them in the contempt of proud and undistinguishing scorn. But aged females are to teach all within their sphere the words of eternal life; and their lessons must derive great influence from their long experience of its

power and sweetness. No young person could hear with indifference such counsels as these:—"I recommend devotion to you, for it has long been my solace,—the fear of God, for it has been my guardian angel,—and love to Christ, for I have never felt it but it blessed me. Let morning and evening prayer be maintained; for I have found the toils of the day blessed by the one, and the slumbers of the night blessed by the other: sanctify the Sabbath; for its worship has strengthened me for the duties and toils of the week: in no instance, and for no object, violate integrity, for I know it to be the best preservative of mental tranquillity, and the surest guide to respect and success; and keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

The Apostle specifies some lessons which aged females are to teach. They are to teach young women to be sober, to impress them with the folly and ruin which result from extravagance or waste, from expensive dress, or luxurious modes of living. They can tell them what evils they have seen resulting from such habits in young women. Such courses have produced quarrels with a husband, and have ruined domestic peace; or, when he has been so foolish as to give his countenance to them, they have withdrawn him from his business, left his goods and shop to the mismanagement of others, and issued sooner or later in a bankruptcy, which combines ruin with disgrace. They must caution them against romantic views of life, and high expectations of enjoyment in the world. You can tell them how little flattering prospects are to be trusted, what clouds have arisen in the brightest

sky, and what roots of bitterness have sprung up in the most flowery field.

They must teach them to love their husbands, to guard their affections from being alienated by the engaging qualities of others, and to keep them from being enfeebled by the discovery of their weaknesses. They must teach them to labour to form the tempers and the manners of their husbands to those qualities which are adapted to make them the object of their respect and esteem, and direct them to manifest their attachment to them by a solicitude for their temporal comfort, and by a zeal for their eternal salvation.

They must teach young women that judicious and enlightened affection with which they ought to regard their children; that they must love them not with that indiscreet fondness which indulges them in every thing, which can subject them to no restraint, and which encourages their petulance and forwardness. Many children have had reason to lament such folly, and to regret that their early years were not spent under a sterner discipline. They must teach them to correct their follies with judgment, to maintain their due authority, and to form them to those pious habits which will be the consolation and the security of life. Mothers are often jealous of the interference of others with their management of their children, and if these hints are given in a tone of asperity or rebuke, they will be repelled with anger and scorn. It is most necessary, therefore, that aged women in giving them, should labour to convince them that they have no object in these counsels but the respectability and the interest of their fami-

lies, and that it is not intended as a charge of deficiency, but as an encouragement to advance in all that is wise and estimable. They must teach them to be discreet, to guard against levities in behaviour and imprudence in their friendships; not to aim at intercourse with families much superior to them in circumstances; for this will subject them to many mortifications, and in attempting to equal them in entertainments, they will involve themselves in embarrassments. Neither must they mingle much with persons where familiarity would be degrading. Married women ought to have no confidant but their husbands. To admit one of the other sex to be so, is to facilitate his conquest of virtuous principle; and in selecting one of their own sex for this purpose, they place the most important secrets at the mercy of one who may employ them to degrade their family.

They must teach them to be cautious in their conversation, and to maintain proper order in all their domestic arrangements. Levity of manner generates unfavourable ideas of the virtuous feelings of those in whom it is apparent, and many have been encouraged in the most hazardous courses, by the counsels of a confidant, or have placed the secrets of families in the power of the artful. The confusion which fills the dwelling of the slattern is painful to her family, and disgusting to all who enter it.

They must be taught to be chaste; not only to abhor the grosser violations of the marriage vow, but every thing that savours of immodesty in dress or indelicacy in manners. They must be taught to regard innocence as their most precious jewel, and the

less of it as the most fatal calamity. Very light ideas of this crime prevailed in the heathen world, and prostitution was one of the rites by which some of their deities were worshipped; now it was most necessary to show that the Gospel required the utmost decorum of manners, purity of desire, and delicacy of language. "Fornication and all uncleanness, let it not once be named among you as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jestings, which are not convenient."* Liberties thought no way dangerous have often been a snare to virtue.

They must be taught to be keepers at home. When females go much from home, their household affairs are neglected, and their children are left to the mercy of servants. Children have suffered severely from servants while thus in their power, and houses have become scenes of sad abuse while none was near to prevent the introduction of improper persons, or their consuming the property of their masters on their lusts. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."†

This abiding at home is not to be the result of indolence; nor is the time thus devoted to it to be spent in sloth. The word signifies, that she must look well to the ways of her household, and practise all the industry, maintain all the frugality, and observe all the order of a good housewife. She must consider her domestic circle as her proper sphere, her dwelling in all its interests as her peculiar care, her household toils as her allotted duty, the order of her abode as

* Eph. v. 3, 4. † Prov. xxvii. 8.

her best distinction, and the comfort of her husband and her children as her sweetest earthly enjoyment.

They must be taught to be good, that is, to treat their servants with humanity, and not with that haughtiness and rigour practised by heathen mistresses to their slaves. The system of slavery so hardens the heart, that, even in the present day, mistresses can not only see cruel punishments inflicted on their slaves, but inflict them with their own hands. Such are the statements which have been given by travellers who have witnessed such scenes, and whose horror at them was regarded as affectation, or as owing to their ignorance of the necessity of such discipline. In our country the chastisement of servants by either master or mistress is never practised, nor would it be permitted; but rough and taunting language has been employed, which is as difficult to be borne, and which, instead of preserving authority, renders it odious.

They were to be compassionate to the poor and afflicted,—a duty little practised among heathens. The precepts, examples, and motives of the Gospel were admirably adapted to form the heart and the manners to kindness. Charity was no favourite lesson with heathen moralists; nay, their best sages taught that the calamities which it relieves were no evils, and that indifference to them was the most dignified temper which the sufferer could maintain.

They were to be enjoined to be kind to strangers, and not to receive, in a cold and sulky manner, those whom their husbands introduced to the hospitality of their dwelling. At that time strangers were obliged

to have recourse to private hospitality, and Job beautifully says, that he opened his doors to the traveller; and though such bounty is not now so requisite, the poor wanderer should not be refused a shelter for the night, if overtaken by it far from any village where he might be accommodated. A thoughtful mother will reflect on what her own children may need, and on the mercy with which Providence rewards mercy.

They were, in fine, to teach them to be obedient to their own husbands. They were not to obey them should they require them to renounce their profession, or to do aught that was inconsistent with it. Their fidelity to Christ required them to resist such commands, with whatever violence they might be enforced. But they were to be taught not to imagine that the Gospel released them from subjection to an unbelieving husband; nay, so far from this, it strengthens the obligation to dutiful and affectionate conduct. They were to be enjoined to take heed, lest by any part of their conduct they gave their husbands reason to assert that their new faith had made them indifferent to their comfort, or sluggish in their domestic employment. They must show that it gave more seal to industry, more softness to entreaty, more courage for difficulties, and more firmness to virtue. Thus, instead of the prejudices of others being excited against religion, as unfriendly to domestic order and peace, they would be forced to acknowledge that it was the best security for both.

Such were the counsels which they were to give, especially to their young relatives; and so far from stirring them up to disregard the claims of their hus-

bands, or fostering that pride which refuses to be controlled, they must inculcate humility and meekness. Let it not be thought that the advantages of modern education, and of regular pulpit-admonition, and the many excellent treatises on the domestic conduct of females, render such counsels unnecessary now. In every sphere where duty is to be practised, we require line upon line, and precept upon precept. The aged mother and grandmother can remind when aught has been forgotten, can apply the lesson when its application has been neglected, and can enforce it by motives which she alone can urge, and at seasons when circumstances make it likely that it will produce the deepest impression.

II. Let us now, in the second place, attend to the injunction of the Apostle to the ministers of religion to inculcate these duties.

It is with the young that other teachers labour, and to them they explain the various parts of education in their respective sphere; but the ministers of the Gospel are intrusted with a message necessary to be regarded by men of all ages and conditions, and, like their great Master, they must say, "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." The minister's office is like that of the faithful and wise steward, who gives to every one in the house his portion of meat in due season. It must not be thought that the aged, from their experience, require not such counsels; for the purest minds need to be stirred up by way of remembrance; and there are many things which, in that season of infirmity, may be neglected or

mistaken. And nothing is more foolish than for persons at other periods of life to complain of the place which such admonitions to the aged occupy in public instruction; for from such counsels they may derive the greatest benefit if they consider them wisely, as the aged may from the lessons which are presented from time to time, in the preaching of the Gospel to the young.

These duties must be inculcated not only in public, but in private admonition. They must be spoken with fidelity, but, at the same time, in that mild and respectful mode which accords with the reverence due to their years. How beautiful is the holy wisdom which marks these counsels of Paul to Timothy, "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; —and the elder women as mothers!"*

There may be other subjects on which a minister might find it more pleasing to enlarge; but it is by the appointment of his Master, and not by his own humour, that he must regulate his instructions. And never should these admonitions be given in the tone or manner which indicates, that to us the task is disagreeable, and that we wish to hurry it over as quickly as possible. We ought to feel solicitous to show and to secure all due respect to every message of Heaven. Sad indeed it is when the disregard of the message must be imputed to its publisher!

But the argument by which the inculcating of these duties is enforced claims our attention. They become sound doctrine. They are suitable to the moral ten-

* 1 Tim. v. 1, 2.

dency of the Gospel. Idle fables, and superstitious ceremonies, might accord with the traditions and habits of the Jews, and manners loose and sensual, and speculations vain and presumptuous, might agree with the dreams and the libertinism of the heathens; but the pure morality and the practical wisdom contained in these counsels could alone suit that doctrine which is according to godliness. "The grace of God," saith Paul in this same chapter, "that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."*

They are fitted to recommend the doctrines of the Gospel. To judge of a doctrine by its fruits, is the dictate of wisdom; and by this test the Apostle knew that Christianity would be tried. Were its teachers to make no application of its principles and laws to the aged, it would impress the minds of the reflecting among the heathen unfavourably to it. Some of their sages have written largely on the duties and the consolations of the aged; the treatise of Cicero on old age had been composed not many years before, and was in high repute for its glowing eloquence; and if Christian teachers left the aged without admonition or solace, the comparison betwixt them and these wise men would not have been to their advantage, or that of their creed. But such practical admonitions from the pulpit, and their due influence seen in the conduct of aged Christians,

* Titus ii. 11, 12.

would show, that the Gospel was the best friend of the last days of man, and that it left not itself without a witness in any scene, or among any class.

I may add, that the inculcating of such duties on the aged would show the truth and the necessity of sound doctrine. It would evince the necessity of that previous change in heart and nature which takes place in regeneration, and without which no duty will be performed in spirit and in truth. It would impress those that heard it with the conviction of the necessity of that supernatural aid which the Gospel so fully reveals, that it is called the ministration of the spirit, and with the value of that righteousness which secures the acceptance of our imperfect services. It gives an opportunity of bringing forward all those various motives to duty which are presented by the promises of the new covenant, by the atonement and intercession of the Redeemer, by the powers of the world to come, and by the coming of the Son of Man in his glory to "render to every man according to his deeds:—To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish."*

CONCLUSION.

This subject suggests necessary admonition to the ministers of the Gospel, and some of them it may convict of habitual inattention to this important charge.

* Rom. ii. 6—9.

How despicable is the fear which restrains some from inculcating such duties, lest they should give offence either to those whose faults they condemn, or those who wish to hear of nothing but grace and salvation! Your warnings will be felt in their consciences as the best proof of friendship, and as the voice of Him who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Let it not be said, that the youth of any minister renders these admonitions unbecoming; the office with which they are invested makes this an imperious duty, and the delicacy with which prudence will characterize them will give them peculiar power. Recollect how Elihu admonished both Job and his friends, and with what fidelity he pointed out what was wrong in the statements of both parties. "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead; I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee."* Let these admonitions be given in a manner which may illustrate the grace, and evince the moral object of the Gospel; and let ministers in their own temper and conduct exemplify what they inculcate, and exhibit a demeanour pure from the vices and even the indiscretions which they condemn.

Let aged Christians, who have attained in some measure the character here delineated, be thankful for that grace which hath made you what you are.

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* Job xxxiii. 7, 8.

You feel that you are far from being so wise and so holy as you ought to be. Let your temper and language be this: "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Think it not enough that you attend to these admonitions, when occasionally presented in public instruction, but let them be the objects of your hourly regard; and be assured, that the virtues of your spirit and conduct will most effectually recommend the lessons you deliver. The counsels of meekness come with a bad grace from the lips of the fretful and the irritable, and the recommendation of devotional habits and exercises from one who in advanced age still lives without God.

There may be aged Christians, who, in the despondency which sometimes sits down on the heart in the days of darkness, are now saying, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. Every revolving year leaves me worse at its close than it found me at its commencement. I am doing nothing but filling up the measure of my iniquities." Let these impressions urge you to hasten to the Saviour, and you shall find that no length or degree of sin can place the penitent beyond the reach of mercy. There is a despondency which sometimes gathers over the aged, which is the result of bodily weakness, and which it is most unfair to regard as a proof of the depress-

* Phil. iii. 13, 14.

ing tendency of religion, or of the hypocrisy of such individuals. They must be soothed by the voice of indulgent commiseration, and committed to the mercy of Him who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

Let those in middle life consider how necessary these qualities and duties are for them. That watchfulness and temperance you will find most conducive both to your temporal and spiritual interest, and that charity which will render you candid and obliging to others, will secure to you similar treatment in the intercourse of life. It is good to acquire the habits, and to be proficients in the virtues of age, before we glide into it: you are now on its borders, and it will be wise for you to rejoice with trembling.

Let the young be exhorted to watch and pray that they enter not into temptation. Let them flee youthful lusts, and avoid even the appearance of evil. The young ought to consider, that an act of gross indiscretion will so stamp on them the character of fools, that no future sagacity will be able to efface the impression. Indulge not in vain speculation, and think not that the contempt of the creed of your fathers is any evidence either of a strong or of a liberal mind. Remember, that Titus was enjoined to deliver this charge to you in the verse which follows the text,—"Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded." Cultivate that good sense, that modesty, that spirituality, that self-control, which this sober-mindedness implies. At your time of life a tendency to backbiting and tale-bearing is a sad evidence of malignity, and this habit will be punished in your being

long left without a real friend. Be grateful for the lessons of the aged, and avail yourselves of no pretext for disregarding them. Let them see in the fixed principles, the habitual self-government, and the mild benevolence of your youth, motives to the duties enjoined on them in this charge. This also we wish, even your perfection. Amen.

DISCOURSE II.

AN OLD DISCIPLE.

ACTS xxi. 16. *There went up with us also certain of the disciples of Cesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.*

THESE words present to our view Paul's journey from Cesarea to Jerusalem. This was a place deeply interesting to the saints during the former dispensation. To it the tribes went up as to the city of their solemnities, and the place of their most sacred intercourse with God and with one another. To Christians it is still more interesting as the place where that sacrifice was offered, which through all eternity will be the source of happiness and the theme of praise, and where some of the most affecting events in the history of the infant church occurred. Often hath the pilgrim trod the path to it; and though we cannot sanction the superstitious ideas which influenced many of them, we must honour the piety which wrought mightily in some, amidst all the prejudices of the age in which they lived, and that holy courage which made them persevere in their attempts to reach it in spite of all the perils, insults, and impositions to which they were subjected. Often, too, has the Christian traveller visited this scene, that he might mark in its present state the

fulfilment of ancient prediction, and gratify the curiosity of his own mind, in the survey of places associated with the best feelings and with the highest hopes of man.

Paul's feelings in going up to Jerusalem were of a mixed kind: he had much to fear, for he had been warned of the persecutions which awaited him; yet he was calm and intrepid. That noble resolution was not the blaze of the moment,—"I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." He felt it in every stage of his progress. He had a duty to discharge, and from that duty he could not shrink. He had the hope of his Master's countenance and blessing, and that hope he would not cast away.

On Paul's arrival at Jerusalem, he was conducted by these disciples to Mnason of Cyprus, as is the proper rendering of the phrase. This man was a native of Cyprus, but was now an inhabitant of Jerusalem, and to his hospitality the Apostle was committed. The intercourse betwixt them would be of the most interesting kind. Much as Paul communicated in public, there were incidents and explanations which could be detailed only amidst the ease and familiarity of domestic intercourse; and we know from his history and from his letters, that, distinguished as he was by the qualities which are requisite in a public character, his heart was susceptible of the warmest friendship, alive to every kind attention, and ready in the most private sphere for every good word and work.

In this discourse, I shall illustrate the account here

given of the character of Mnason, and shall then point out those objects of peculiar interest which are to be seen in such a disciple.

1. In examining the account here given of Mnason, we behold, in the first place, a person of long-standing in the church. Some have supposed, that he was converted to the Christian faith when Paul and Barnabas visited Cyprus. But the epithet attached to him leads us to suppose that he was one of our Lord's first followers and disciples. How many things had occurred to try his attachment to the Gospel! The crucifixion of our Lord, so dark an event to the Apostles, must have been so to him also. The virulent calumnies of the Jews, and the persecuting violence to which the followers of Christ were subjected, he could not escape. His situation and circumstances were superior to those of many of the disciples, and would thus mark him out as the object of hatred and abuse to the enemies of Christianity. Stephen and James had both fallen as martyrs in the cause of the Redeemer, and many had been imprisoned, and scourged, and spoiled, to gratify the rapacity and cruelty of their enemies, and to terrify others into apostacy from the Gospel. Yet, in spite of all these difficulties, he kept the faith. He could employ the language of the worthies of old,—"Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore

broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death."*

But there was another trial of his steadfastness which he had nobly sustained. Cyprus, the island of his birth, was a place noted for the dissolute manners of its inhabitants. There unblushing wantonness was exhibited by all classes; and the young were taught to regard sensual pleasure as the chief happiness of man. In embracing the Gospel, he had professed his resolution to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts; and irksome to nature as the mortifications and the rigid temperance of the first Christians must have appeared, amidst the remembrance of the scenes of his early days, he persisted in the strictest sobriety, as well as in taking up his cross daily, and in following Christ.

2. In Mnason we see one who had been long a student of the Gospel revelation, and who was still devoted to the study of it. Many years before this, he had taken his place at our Lord's feet, allured by that gracious call, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls;" and from that time he had been growing in the knowledge of Christ. There are some of such a versatile cast of mind, that no subject interests them long. What strikes their fancy they pursue with great ardour for a little, but soon their relish for it declines, and the mind rushes on in some new pursuit. But how different was the case with this good man! He had been led to count all things

* Psalm xliv. 13. 17—19.

but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and that sacrifice he had never regretted. There is increasing pleasure in the study of the things of God, in labouring to apprehend the height and the depth, the breadth and the length of the love of Christ. This is an object which will engage the attention of the wisest and the best of men throughout all the generations of time, and throughout all the ages of eternity. In this subject there is every thing to allure the contemplation and to charm the heart.

In old age the faculties decline, and the study of other subjects is felt irksome; but the great salvation can brighten the failing eye and raise the sinking heart. Mnason still waited at wisdom's gates,—still lifted up his voice to God for understanding,—still had his delight in the law of the Lord, and meditated in it day and night.

It is a very striking fact, that pride of understanding is the common fault of youth; but very rarely is it to be met with in age. The young, whose views are limited, imagine they know every thing; but the aged, "who have followed on to know the Lord," feel that their acquaintance with the character, works, and ways of God, is very superficial and very partial. Their daily prayers are for the spirit of wisdom, and they cannot walk through the vale of years but in the light of the Lord.

3. In Mnason we see one who has been long distinguished by the graces of the Christian character, and who still exercises them. The semblance of those graces is exhibited by many for a little, and there

are various circumstances which lead to this. It may arise from the impulse of strong conviction, from a wish to acquire reputation and influence with a certain class in society, or from some striking display of their beauty and power. It is soon laid aside where it does not originate in the renewing of the Holy Ghost; but where it does, the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day. Thus it was in Mnason.

But what are the peculiar characters of a disciple? Attachment to all Christian ordinances, self-denial, humility, and charity. Attachment to Christian ordinances marks them; and this was peculiarly the badge of disciples in that early period, when there was so little to allure the hypocritical within the pale of the church; self-denial, for our Lord makes this his first requirement: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself;" humility, for this was his first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;"* and charity, for he saith, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."† Among Jews, the prevailing temper was bigotry; and among the heathens, national antipathies were general and powerful; but among Christians, love was to be the cement of their union, the beauty of their character, and the glory of their creed. Long had Mnason worshipped God according to the simple rites of the New Testament, and still he encompassed his altars. Long had he denied himself, and he did not deem

* Matt. v. 3. † John xiii. 35.

the infirmities of age any excuse for self-indulgence. Long had he been clothed with humility, and he felt it the best attire for age; and long had he walked in love, and still he exercised its spirit, and obeyed its dictates.

4. In Mnason we behold an old man still actuated by public spirit, and still eager to show kindness and hospitality. The old are ready to imagine that they are entitled to be exempted from all public cares, and to consider the receiving and entertaining of strangers as a service which should not be required from them. They have given a surly repulse to a proposal of this kind; and when their answer is more soft, they will state the impossibility of their paying the attentions which may be necessary, and the uneasiness to which guests would be subjected by arrangements in their dwellings required by their frailties. How different was the case with Mnason! His kind and courteous temper and habits must have been well known to the members of the church, or they would not have brought Paul to his house; and, eager as they were that he should be properly accommodated, they could think of no place so suitable as his comfortable dwelling.

What a beautiful sight is it to mark the courtesies of the aged, and to find persons at that period mild, frank, and obliging, whom we dreaded to see cold, peevish, and austere; to behold the heart flowing in compassion, not frozen in selfishness; the smile of cheerfulness on the faded countenance, and the offices of hospitality felt as a pleasure amidst their many infirmities! How beautiful is it to see the aged giv-

ing commandment to their young descendants to minister to the comfort of visitors, and to perform for them services which they cannot accomplish! Often has a solicitude for the accommodation of a pastor been expressed by aged Christians on the bed of languishing, and they have shown amidst their many infirmities an affectionate interest in the comforts of his lot and the success of his ministry.

There was a circumstance which peculiarly indicates the excellent spirit of this old man. The Apostle Paul, from his known zeal and active exertions in behalf of the Gospel, was most obnoxious to his bigoted countrymen; and from the boldness of his temper, and the ardour of his mind, it was not to be supposed that he would remain in quietness and inactivity in Jerusalem. To have such a man for his guest, Mnason knew would bring upon him the dislike and the hatred of many; and if any violence was done to Paul, all that showed him countenance were likely to share in it: yet with such perils before him, which no prudent man could avoid foreseeing, or permit himself to despise, he welcomed the man of God to his house, and was willing to share with him in all that might befall him. Such conduct the Apostle would value as it deserved. We know how affectionately he remembered such generous hosts in his prayers, and the mercy he sought for Onesiphorus, who often refreshed him, and was not ashamed of his chain, we may believe was sought for Mnason and for all his house.

II. Let us now, in the second place, point out

those objects of peculiar interest which are to be seen in an old disciple.

1. We see in him a striking proof of God's gracious care. When we think on the feebleness of gracious principles, the unfavourable circumstances in which they are placed, both in the heart and in the world, on the enemies who seek their destruction, on the various methods which they employ for this purpose, on their power, craft, and malice, which make them so formidable, a power for which human energy is no match, a craft which laughs human foresight and vigilance to scorn, and a malice which nought can satiate, we see that the preservation of such principles in such a condition must be the result of a supernatural care. How affecting is the memorial of age, and how much does it imply that is honourable to the divine patience and bounty! "Hitherto hath the Lord helped." The frail bark which has accomplished a long and perilous voyage, and which is stored with the most valuable commodities of the different ports at which it has touched, which has weathered many a storm, and which is now drawing near its harbour, we mark with deep interest. Such is the old disciple. And we trust that when the days are short and gloomy, and the noise of the breakers heard from afar, indicates that the ship is approaching a coast where landing is difficult through the swell of the ocean, or the rockiness of the bottom, the pilot who hath guided her so far will not abandon her now, but will secure to her an abundant entrance into Emmanuel's haven. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you, will

perform it to the day of Jesus Christ."* Sweet was the recollection of this care in the mind of the Patriarchs, as it had been displayed in the provision made for their temporal necessities and spiritual salvation, and most powerfully did it encourage them to commit their descendants to the mercy which could thus uphold them from youth to age. This care appeared the more wonderful when they remembered that they had been strangers and wanderers, had few or no earthly friends, and were objects of jealousy and dislike to all around them.

When we think on this care, as exercised in such a multitude of instances, and from one generation to another; exercised amidst the rule of the universe, and the pure and lofty homage of celestial intelligences; exercised amidst ingratitude, folly, and perverseness, in their most disgusting forms, and to a period when it cannot be glorified in such active results as before, we may well exclaim with the Psalmist, "How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! how great is the sum of them!—they are more than can be numbered: when I awake, I am still with thee."† Let us adore that mercy which so quickly conveys so many little children to Heaven, and that mercy which brings such multitudes through fire and through water to a wealthy place.

2. We see in an old disciple, a satisfying proof of the reality and the power of religion. How completely are the old disgusted with other pursuits, even those in which they once engaged with the greatest eagerness, and to which they were allured by the gayest

* Phil. i. 6. † Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18.

promises. Such they now pronounce to be vanity and vexation of spirit. The most ardent votary of ambition, who sought the distinctions of this world through all the mazes of deceit, and over all the obstacles which could be placed in his way, has felt in old age, that he has been walking in a vain show, and has confessed that he has been pursuing a phantom. The man devoted to pleasure, whose time was occupied and whose substance was spent in the pursuit of sensual enjoyment, who imagined that pleasure would never lose its power to enchant, and that the house of mirth would always be delightful to him, has felt his heart sicken at what was once the scene of rapture, and turned away in loathing from what once seemed to him the summit of bliss. This also has been the case with men devoted to science and literature; speculations which once were so delightful, and controversial discussions in which they engaged with their whole hearts, appear to them, as they advance in life, idle as a dream, and trifling as the brawls of children; and the simple-hearted peasant, who knows nothing beyond the mere elements of Christian knowledge and duty is, in their apprehensions, much wiser and happier than they are.

But how different is the case with the old disciple! The objects which first excited his attention appear as estimable to him as ever, and so far from regretting any sacrifice he has made for their sake, he would make it still if he was called to it. What once filled him with rapture, when his fancy was bright and his affections were glowing, is still his solace; he hath not discovered the least insecurity in the basis on which

he builds, the least uncertainty in the promises on which God hath caused him to hope, or the least oppression in the yoke which the Lord required him to take. While few worldlings have been able to recommend it to the young to devote themselves as they did to earthly things, the old disciple can say to them, "O taste and see that God is good!" Of this we have an admirable example in the case of Solomon, while he represents as vanity all which the worldly man approves and desires, and narrates the trial which he had made of all that the world could exhibit to interest. This is the conclusion of the whole matter; this is stated as the whole duty of man; and what is it that is dignified by such appellations? It is the fear of God and the keeping of his commandments. To this Solomon had early devoted himself, and, amidst his impressions of the vanity of all below the sun, to commend it was his last employment, and while every other hope had failed him, this was sure and steadfast.

3. We see in the old disciple, precious stores of experience. Days should speak, and multitudes of years should teach wisdom. The old man who has lived in the most obscure spot has seen much to detail for the advantage of the young. How instructive is his review of the course of Providence! Who can hear him talk of the families which were flourishing in the days of his youth, but whose estates and palaces are now the property of others, without feeling how foolish it is to trust in uncertain riches? Who can hear him detailing the ruin which God brought on the presumptuous transgressor, and the

detection which has covered the treacherous with shame, without feeling, that to walk uprightly and humbly, is both our happiness and our safety? Who can hear him tell how God enlarged him when he was in distress, and showed him the way in which he should go, in answer to his earnest prayers for relief and for guidance, without feeling the value and acknowledging the power of prayer?

When the young hear his details of the ruin in which he has seen many who might have been the joy of their friends involve themselves by folly and dissipation, they must feel the necessity of circumspection. The accounts which he gives of the influence of religious ordinances, and of the advices, warnings, and consolations addressed to their audiences by holy men now with God, are solemn like a voice from the other world. I may add also, that the accounts he gives of the passages of scripture which were brought to his recollection in the hour of temptation and in the season of despondency, and which had a most salutary influence in strengthening his virtuous determination, and in elevating his drooping heart, are well fitted to endear to us the word of God, and to induce us to hold fast our integrity.

These statements of the old disciple are so opposite to the flattering pictures of a presumptuous fancy, that some may feel disposed to set them at nought, but the difference betwixt them is like that betwixt a vivid dream and a sober reality. My young friends, ye have scarcely begun to ascend the hill, and you imagine that there is little difficulty or peril in reaching its summit; but the aged are near it, and they can

tell of the storms that have beat upon them, the wild beasts that have alarmed them, the rocks they had to climb, and the heaps of ice and snow over which they had to pass: but they have also to tell of the fragrance which charmed them, the magnificence and beauty that opened wider and wider on their eye as they rose, the honey they found in the rock, and the first and last view of the rising and setting sun.

4. In the old disciple we behold a most striking contrast to the character and state of the aged transgressor. How many are there of that description? There are persons who, in their youth, were left to spend the Sabbath as they pleased, and who, in their old age, occupy that day in sauntering about their doors, and in all the folly of vain conversation. Their opportunities of salvation are about to expire, yet they feel not the least impression that this is the case, and turn away from that light which in a few days shall be hid from their eyes.

There are persons who in their youth were addicted to envy, and malice, and evil speaking, who were the objects of fear and hatred to their companions, on account of these wicked propensities, who in old age are more virulent in their tempers than ever. The poison of asps is under their tongue; nothing gratifies them so much as the misfortunes of their neighbours, and they are eager to instil their own prejudices into their young connexions, by detailing to them, in the most exaggerated form, the ill usage they have met with.

There are persons too, who, in early life, were addicted to sensuality, who, in old age, show that their

heart is most debauched, by their lewd conversation, and the delight they take in recalling scenes, at the idea of which they would blush if they were not lost to all modesty. It is truly painful to behold such characters; and from them the mind turns with delight, to mark the aged saint, rich in faith and bright in virtue. The one is like the long stagnant pool, in whose dark waters venomous creatures have been multiplying, and whose rank weeds and noxious exhalations make it the object of disgust and terror. The other is like the stream purifying in its course, and rushing to the sea with a current clear, yet majestic.

5. In the old disciple we behold an object to whom many important offices are due from us. To such a man we owe high veneration. If we are to rise up before the old man, peculiar deference is certainly due to the old disciple. The hoary head is a crown of glory if it is found in the way of righteousness. In looking to such a man, our feelings are not like those with which we contemplate an old tree which has withstood the blast for ages, but which is now rotten,—or an ancient tower, lofty, but crumbling, attracting the attention of those that love to study the remains of former days, but unfit for the residence of human beings, and left now only to the rooks in its battlements, and the eft in its floors; but they are like those with which we behold the field that is white for harvest, or the sun setting amidst refulgent clouds.

Let us show them every kind attention in our power. The infirmities of age have a claim on our pity, whatever be the character of the individual in whom

we trace them; but they have peculiar claims on our kindness when they are seen in those who have served their generation according to the will of God, and when they may have been hastened or aggravated by the exertions they have made in the cause of piety and humanity. We know, from the excellence of their character, that they will never ask aught but what is absolutely necessary, and that the gifts of the benevolent will not be abused by them. In them you will meet with the grateful feeling which is so encouraging in any kind ministrations, and the sagacity and the patience which will make them yield more extensive and substantial relief.

Solicit their counsels. The difficulties which now distress you once harassed them,—the opposition from which you are ready to shrink they braved,—the disappointment under which your hearts are sinking tried their fortitude, and they found it salutary in its elevating their hearts to God, and they are thus qualified for directing you in the season of perplexity, and for reanimating your failing courage.

Let us beware of speaking lightly of their notions or habits as antiquated. Amid the presumption of youth, and the fascination of novelty, there is a tendency to this, which delicacy, prudence, and gratitude, ought to repress.

6. We see in the old disciple much solemn instruction as to death and heaven. The old disciple we see on the verge of the grave. Useful as his
in, it must terminate; but, instead of
let us bless God that it has been
extent. We see the old disciple

ready for heaven. If the infirmities of his body indicate that he is ready for the grave, if we see this in his decaying senses and failing flesh, the lively exercise of his grace and his detachment from the world show us that the vessel of mercy is prepared for glory; that faltering voice shall soon sing the new song, and that wrinkled face shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

I may add, that for such a disciple there are higher degrees of glory reserved in heaven than for others. If a cup of cold water given to a disciple shall in nowise lose its reward, what will be Christ's gracious notice of a life full of good works and of almsdeeds! If of the little child, whose abode in this world is but for a moment, Jesus says, that to it pertains the kingdom of God, though no traces of his Spirit's operation were visible about it, what shall be their portion who to threescore years and ten, or to fourscore, walked before him in truth and with a perfect heart? If to the thief on the cross, who never felt one pang of true repentance, nor uttered one prayer of faith till his last hour, Jesus said, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise," what shall be his nearness to the Saviour who loved him from his youth, and who could say for so many years, "To me to live is Christ?" These rewards, it must be remembered, are all of grace; and whether the believer's progress to glory be long or short, quick or slow, grace reigns through righteousness to his eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

CONCLUSION.

Let the old disciple beware of every thing which may bring discredit on his profession. Having lived so long in the meekness and the gentleness of Christ, beware of exhibiting any appearance of peevishness and fretfulnes. Now is the time for the last and heaviest trial of patience; and let it be the time of its greatest triumph. Having lived a life of prayer, be more earnest in it than ever. You have long had your conversation in heaven; give no occasion to any to say that it is a hard thing for you to part with the world. O! let not a profession so long supported with honour be blemished now. Be thankful to God for the inestimable mercy of early conversion and upholding grace. Be useful as long as it is in your power to be so. Cultivate peculiar intimacy with aged Christians like yourselves. It has been remarked, how readily the feeble and the infirm mingle with one another; and this should be especially the case with aged saints. Ye can enter into one another's feelings and recollections. And pity aged transgressors; pray for them, and say to them, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

Let the aged transgressor be exhorted to consider his ways. Ye have nearly filled up the measure of your iniquities, and, ah! how large is it, and ye are bringing on yourselves wrath to the uttermost. Sin may yield some enjoyment to the youthful transgressor, but to you it can give none. You feel that its fruit is shame, and that its wages are death. Of your salvation we almost despair; and were it not that the Lord Jesus is able to save to the uttermost we would

despair. He excludes you not from his gracious invitations; and he hath made some at your period of life monuments of mercy. You may remember persons whose course of folly and impiety was long and audacious, who were at last arrested; made to feel, to confess, and to forsake their wickedness, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Go to God for such mercy: his hand is not shortened that it cannot save. This may be the last effort of grace to save you: improve it, or all may be lost.

To the young this subject suggests the most important lessons. You wish to live to old age, and to be good men, then. However you may desire to spend your youth, few at your period contemplate an old age of folly and vice. But think how unlikely conversion in old age is, even though you should live to it. The Spirit is provoked to withdraw, and the heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Even though you should then attain conversion, think what pangs of regret and fear must attend it. While to the old disciple religion brings the most gratifying recollections, to you it must call up your past life to wring the heart with remorse. Life ending while its great task is scarcely begun, judgment at hand, on which you have scarcely bestowed a thought, is most frightful. Think of the beauty and the sweetness of early piety, and how lovely in the eyes of Heaven is the young disciple! To the God of salvation let the spring consecrate all its blossoms and autumn all its fruits. To him let life dedicate all its labour, and on him let death repose all its hope. Amen.

DISCOURSE III.

THE CHARACTER OF BARZILLAI.

2 SAMUEL xix. 34—37. *And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?*

I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?

Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?

Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother: but behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee.

ADVERSITY is the test of friendship. The attentions paid us in the season of prosperity, the smile of welcome, the voice of flattery, and the offers of service, so general in such circumstances, may, in the day of our calamity, be succeeded by neglect, reproach, and indignity. It is the man who shows his regard for us when the world is frowning on us, and who, amidst

cruel persecution, cleaves to us more closely than ever, that we honour as a true friend; and as to him we form the resolution, that, if ever it is in our power, we will show the deep sense we entertain of his worth.

Such a friend to David was Barzillai. When his crown and his life were sought by his own son,—when the people whom he had done so much to serve rushed, with a few exceptions, into rebellion against him,—when every tribute of respect paid to David was likely to be made known to Absalom, and to bring down the vengeance on them which he had sworn against the adherents of his father, he met his rightful sovereign with such refreshments as the time permitted him to prepare, and with the kindest wishes for his safe and happy return to his palace and throne. This fidelity and generosity made a strong impression on the mind of David, and it was not forgotten amidst the exultation of success. When this venerable man presented himself to his sovereign to express his complacency in his safety, and his wishes for his future establishment and prosperity, David urged him to accompany him to Jerusalem, and to share with him in all the goodness which the Lord had provided for him. Such a tried friend he felt that he could not too highly value; and he who sympathized with him in his misfortunes was in his estimation best entitled to participate in the blessings to which God was restoring him. Ingratitude has been often charged on kings; and too often has the worthless favourite engrossed the attentions and been loaded with the honours which were due to those whose counsels and whose bravery had established them on their thrones; but this was not the

vice of David; and if it be said of him that he remembered injuries, it is as true of him, that he never forgot a kindness. An offer so tempting to a worldly mind, Barzillai declined in a manner respectful but firm, and assigns such reasons for it as are most honourable to his good sense and to his piety. It may be useful to consider the excellent spirit manifested in the reply of this good old man, and the example which it holds forth to all who, like him, have come to the last stage of life.

Barzillai lived under the strong and operative impression of his nearness to death. Many are the warnings of death which the aged receive. Of the multitudes with whom they have mingled in the journey of life few now remain; and the decay of their faculties, both bodily and mental, indicates that they shall soon pass away from the land of the living. Yet it is wonderful with what eagerness many of the old cling to the idea that they have some years to live, and how gratified they are with every compliment from others which strengthens that idea. They call up to their thoughts the instances of extreme age which the curious have recorded, and are ready to flatter themselves that they shall be equally distinguished. Little as life has to recommend it at such periods, none prize it so much as the aged; and even when they do admit they have not long to live, it is sometimes spoken in mere thoughtlessness, or, if it is the dictate of conviction, it is with evident reluctance that it is acknowledged. And many of the old are there who readily own that death is near, whose impressions of this have not the least influence on their

temper and conduct. They see the winter's storms gathering, but prepare no shelter.

How different was the case with Barzillai! To him the idea of death was familiar, and it had in it nothing unpleasant. He saw it to be near, and he had no wish that it had been at a distance; he felt that he was now taking his last journey, and that little remained for him now but to die; yet how calm was his mind! Let it not be said that this composure was the mere apathy of blunted feeling; for it appears, from a part of this beautiful narrative, that his sensibility of heart was strong and tender. It arose from his faith in that Redeemer, who was in the fulness of time to abolish death; from his confidence in the virtue of that sacrifice, which he was to offer to secure his deliverance from the second death; and from the testimony of conscience, that in godly sincerity and active goodness he had maintained his conversation in the world. Neither let it be said that this is attributing a superiority to the terrors of death to ancient believers greater than was possible under that dispensation; for in this language his friend and sovereign David anticipates death and his safety in it: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

2. In Barzillai we see resignation and contentment under the infirmities of age. Some are careful to conceal these infirmities, employ every device they can think of for this purpose, and are irritated by the language or conduct by which others indicate that

* Psalms, xxiii. 4.

these are known to them. Nothing appears more ridiculous to the young, the healthy, and the gay, than the attempts of the old to make them believe that they are as nimble or vigorous as ever; the infirmities which in other circumstances would excite compassion, in this case produce only ridicule and contempt. Such infirmities are like to the rotten trunk hid under ivy, or the potsherd covered with silver dross.

Others talk of their infirmities, but it is in the language of fretfulness. Their friends who are with them they abuse for want of sympathy, and threaten with the neglect and the unkindness which they shall meet with when they come to the days of darkness. Visitors have to listen to their minute and peevish details of their pains and languors; and if their attention happens at any time to flag, or if they do not testify their sympathy in such strong terms as were anticipated, the harshest reflections are expressed, and the wish is repeated, with a violence which shows that whatever hath become feeble, their evil temper hath not, "that they were taken from a scene where there was none to pity them."

How opposite was the conduct of Barzillai! He states to the king the failure of his bodily senses, and his utter inability to relish what gave so much satisfaction to others. He does this not in the tone of murmur or complaint, but of mild and cheerful acquiescence. He had no wish to be considered by David and his courtiers as in aught different from what he was. He remembered with gratitude the many years in which he had enjoyed with exquisite relish the beauty, the fragrance, and the melodies of nature,

he occupied: but he had no wish of the kind: he was satisfied with what he had, and he dwelt among his own people.

It may be said, that Barzillai's ideas of the attractions of a court were very limited; that there are other things desirable about it besides those to which he alludes; and that this must lessen the support due to his declining the invitation to go to it. But hearest Solomon, not from around a throne, but from the throne itself, pronouncing all the splendour of the palace, all the heaps of its treasures, and all the gaiety of its pleasures, vanity and vexation of spirit. The higher the station we occupy, the more disquieting is the dust of the grave; the greater our gains, the more sad the thought that they must all be left behind; and the more rapturous our pleasures, the more painful is the bitterness of death. God can put a blessing into the humblest fare, which will make it sweeter than all the delicacies of luxury; he can give to retirement a charm not to be found in all the pomp of courts, and to the feeble psalm of aged piety a power to elevate the mind, and to soothe the heart, which the finest music cannot exercise; he can bless in the world, and he can bless without it.

4. In the conduct of Barzillai we behold an amiable solicitude not to be burdensome to David. He felt that though the kindness of the king urged him to go to Jerusalem, and to be intimately associated with him in all the privileges of his lot, that he was not now fit to bear a suitable part in such scenes, that, instead of being an assistant or a comfort David amidst the toils of royalty, he would be

days which yet remained to him he wished to be spent in that quiet retirement where his thoughts might neither be distracted by the hurry of public life, nor his affections withdrawn from those celestial objects to which he had laboured to elevate them: for these few days he had employment of the most solemn kind, and to it he wished every moment to be devoted.

His language does not bear the least indication of regret that he was obliged to decline an invitation so marked by gratitude and kindness; he had no relish for aught that a court could present; he beheld the shadows of death resting on the scene of splendour and beauty, and his affections had been raised to the crown of glory that fadeth not away, and to the living fountains of water.

In general, it is not to the honours and the pleasures of the world that the aged are devoted, but to its wealth. How often are they seen as reluctant to part with it, and as eager to amass it, as if their happiness depended on it. But how long have you to live, that you should lay up treasures upon earth? It is most foolish to load the back that is bending with infirmity with such a weight of care; to make the last stage of your journey more difficult, by joining augmented burdens with declining strength; and to lay up nought in heaven where the good live for ever, and so much for earth where there is no abiding.

Barzillai was dead to the world's gains. Had he gone with David, he might have bestowed on him some of the large property which fell to him by his inheriting all the possessions of Saul, or, had he given the [illegible] he would have added to the heritage which

he occupied: but he had no wish of this kind; he was satisfied with what he had, and he dwelt among his own people.

It may be said, that Barzillai's ideas of the attractions of a court were very limited; that there are other things desirable about it besides those to which he alludes; and that this must lessen the respect due to his declining the invitation to go to it. But behold Solomon, not from around a throne, but from the throne itself, pronouncing all the splendour of the palace, all the heaps of its treasures, and all the gaiety of its pleasures, vanity and vexation of spirit. The higher the station we occupy, the more degrading is the dust of the grave; the greater our gains, the more sad the thought that they must all be left behind; and the more rapturous our pleasures, the more painful is the bitterness of death. God can put a blessing into the humblest fare, which will make it sweeter than all the delicacies of luxury; he can give to retirement a charm not to be found in all the pomp of courts, and to the feeble psalm of aged piety a power to elevate the mind, and to solace the heart, which the finest music cannot exercise; he can bless in the world, and he can bless without it.

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cumbrance to him; and the idea of this he could not endure.

It would be wise for the old, and happy for others, if all of them felt such a delicacy; yet how often do they insist on being carried to scenes of enjoyment, where they require from those who should be otherwise occupied attentions incessant and fatiguing, and where their dissatisfaction, which they cannot conceal, mars the comfort of all around them! The shattered bark is fit only for the sheltered lake, and if it is towed out to sea, much toil may be expected by those who take it in charge, and fear and trembling by those who have their place in it.

It is best for the old to remain with those who know their humours, and can accommodate themselves to them, and what is necessary to their comfort, and will be eager to obtain it. And it will also be wise for all who are in middle life, to endeavour to make such provision for the helpless period of old age, that they may neither be necessitated to be a burden to their friends nor to the public. Dependence on any earthly [illegible] is painful to the feelings. Where a man is [illegible] to be so by misfortunes which have deprived [illegible] the savings of his years of industry, he is ex[illegible] those bitter feelings which wring the [illegible] who was idle when he should have been [illegible] destitute of all foresight where he ought to [illegible] provident. How noble was the spirit of [illegible] to whom the idea of being a burden on [illegible] the public was intolerable, who wished [illegible] his last meal, and to whom his [illegible]; for he was at his usual labour

two days before his departure! Such a spirit was once more common than it is now. If Barzillai could not bear the thought of being an encumbrance to David, whose generosity and kindness would have made him deem it none, how painful must be the thought to a right-hearted man, that he is felt and complained of as a burden, and that the supply he is compelled by necessity to receive is given with such an angry scowl, and with such harsh reflections! There are, indeed, too many cases in which a clamorous suppliant harasses by the frequency of his claims, and disgusts by the confidence of his pretensions; but there are others in which the meek and lowly are frowned on and repulsed. How easy would it be for Providence to make the scorner feel the misery of dependence, and of dependence aggravated by cold neglect or insolent upbraiding! Such inhumanity is permitted, that the spirit of independence may be more generally cherished and more highly prized.

5. In this passage we see the solicitude of Barzillai for the interests of his son. There are many in the world, who, if they cannot enjoy particular scenes, are unwilling that others should go to them; but such was not the temper of this man; nor did he, like a peevish cynic, think with contempt and scorn of the dignities and advantages of the world, and deem them unworthy of the pursuit of any. Like a wise man, he saw the attractions of the court, and he saw also its snares; and though he felt it by no means a suitable place for one so advanced in years as himself, he considered that his son was at that time of life that he could relish it, and that he might be useful to a king whom it was his delight to oblige.

It would be most criminal in a parent to labour to fix a son in a scene which he himself shunned on account of its perilous nature; but it cannot be wrong to fix him in one which his father is too old to occupy.

It is most worthy of notice with what modesty he makes this proposal for his son: he was not like the mother of the two sons of Zebedee, who came to our Lord and said to him, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom;"* for his request was not made till after David's urgent entreaty that he should accompany him; and, instead of specifying what post or what office he wished his son to fill, he left it entirely to the wisdom and kindness of his royal master. This is a pattern worthy to be copied by parents soliciting the favour of others to their children; and while it may be necessary that the mode in which you wish them to show their countenance should be specified, the time and the measure of this should be left to their own liberality and discretion. There are seasons when applications of this kind come with more propriety and force than others, and these ought to be improved.

And if a desire may thus be expressed to men in behalf of young persons by their aged parents and friends, much more eager should they be in seeking that the great Redeemer may receive them among his followers, and bless them with the tokens of his favour. We may err as to the kindness, the virtue, or the sufficiency of those to whose patronage we commit the young; but all fulness dwells in our Re-

* Matt. xx. 21.

deemer, and he hath said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servants be."*

6. Another amiable feature of the character of Barzillai noted in this passage is his modest sense of his own services. Nothing is more common than for men to entertain and to express a high conceit of any benefit they may have conferred, any sacrifice they have made, or any hardship they have endured for others. They are seldom satisfied with any gratitude which is expressed, and with any return which is offered for it. Amidst the retirement and inactivity of old age the mind dwells on what it has done, and feels disposed to solace itself under the indolence and infirmities of that period by magnifying past efforts, and to remind those in whose behalf they were made, of their obligations to their active kindness. Men do not love to be told of such services, and are apt to consider it as an impeachment of their gratitude, and as originating in vanity, or in a more mercenary motive. What has been done to kings is recorded in the annals of families, and talked of from generation to generation as the proudest distinction of their name, and the noblest inheritance transmitted by an ancestor.

But how different was the temper of Barzillai! The service he had done to David was valuable in itself, and was especially so in the time and place at which it was paid: of it the king entertained a far higher sense than he did; for he said, why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?

* John xii. 26.

It is rare to find an earthly benefactor corresponding in grateful sensibility, or in the return of benefits to the kindness shown him; but when it is the case, we ought to mark it with due approbation; and delightful it must be to such persons to have it said, You have much more than repaid me.

The feelings of Barzillai are those of the just, in reference to the notice God is pleased to take of their humble efforts to serve him. Such was the temper of David, when, after God's gracious acceptance of his design to build him an house, and his promise of mercy to him and to his seed, he went in and sat before the Lord and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come: and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"* Such will be their feelings in judgment, when the Redeemer shall call them to his glory, and notice the work and labour of love which they showed to his name. Their answer shows how strongly they feel themselves to have been but unprofitable servants; and through eternity they will be conscious that the rewards of Heaven are all of grace, and be astonished that what was so defective should be honoured by an approbation so ample, and followed by results so blessed.

7. The filial piety of Barzillai is the last feature of his character which the text presents to us. Many years had elapsed since the death of his parents, and God

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2 Sam. vii. 18, 19.

had given him a family of his own, in whom he was happy; yet the idea of his father and mother was dear to his heart; his wish was that he might rest in their sepulchre; and he was reluctant to go to any place where the execution of this purpose might be impracticable, or might be neglected. This was a thought which made even the grave less gloomy—that there his father and mother slept—and that there he would sleep beside them. Such a wish has been felt by men in all countries and ages. We have known the old man, who felt his last sickness commencing, insisting on his removal even from a scene of comfort to his native spot, which had few attractions but this, that it was the place of his fathers' sepulchres. Let it not be ridiculed as the feeling of dotage; for it has operated in the strongest minds, and is the voice of nature in the human heart. It is the appointment of Heaven, that the first attachment of which the heart is conscious should be its last; and it is no difficult matter to point out wise reasons for this.

It has a happy tendency to maintain mutual love betwixt parents and children, and to excite a youth to the zealous imitation of a parent's holy pattern; for how can the idea of his dust mingling with theirs be soothing, if conscience tells him that he destroyed their peace, and that he is an utter stranger to their virtues? And what can be better adapted than this to lead to a serious concern to meet with them in heaven, and to excite us to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. How terrible must not the idea be to a vicious man,—I may be laid in the

grave of holy parents, but in the resurrection they must disown me, and abandon me for ever! Often has their grave been surveyed in grateful recollection, and their memory honoured by affectionate praise; but if it is visited after I am laid there it will be considered as a profanation of that hallowed spot, and the contrast betwixt my life and theirs which shall then be made will render mine more loathsome. It appears evident from this wish, that Barzillai had been a dutiful son, and that the character of his parents had been so excellent, that he regarded a connexion with them as his honour. Favourably as children wish to think of departed parents, it is impossible that they can anticipate being deposited in their graves, if they have been impious and profligate, with any feeling of complacency. They must think of it as a spot where the curse of God and the horror of man rests. This feeling, therefore, though the dictate of nature, is friendly to grace.

The feeling of which I speak has been abused by the superstitious, who have requested to be laid in the sepulchres of those deemed eminent saints, under the idea that their power with God will ensure their safety, and that they will be regarded with favour for their sakes. It may have made some unhappy, whose wishes as to this could not possibly be gratified, and may have engrossed that solicitude which should have been directed to more important objects; but still the principle is salutary, and the heart which never felt it, or which can ridicule it as a childish whim, or as the freak of misguided affection, is not likely to be influenced by any of those other work-

ings of nature which render the character so amiable, and the manners so sweet, and which enlightened reason regulates, but never will repress.

I proceed now to recommend the imitation of his example to the aged by some considerations.

1. Consider how much the honour of religion is concerned in your temper and conduct. When disciples at an earlier period act unsuitably to their profession and obligations, the apology is sometimes made, that they are but imperfectly acquainted with it, and have not yet had opportunities for imbibing its spirit so fully. But no excuse of this kind can be presented for you who have watched so long at Wisdom's gates. What will the world think of the revelation of the glories of a future state, if they behold you minding earthly things, and reluctant to admit the thought of your departure? How excusable will they think their attachment to the world is, if they see it to be the ruling passion of age! On the other hand, your weanedness from the world will appear to them the testimony of experience to its emptiness and vanity; your cheerful patience under infirmities, will prove the strength of your consolation; and your tranquillity in the views of death will be an evidence of the power of the hope of immortality. Thus will you plead its cause, and plead it with success.

2. Consider how much your own happiness is concerned in it. You have felt the vexation of worldly cares in the former periods of life, and how the mind, at its most vigorous season, is burdened and harassed with them; and will you make yourselves miserable

by them now? It will give you no pain to be excluded from scenes of gaiety, if you are impressed with their vanity; and easy will it be for you to leave them all in death. Think also how quiet and pleasant old age will be, if you are thus reconciled to its infirmities. The fretfulness with which you tease others will torment yourselves; but the fortitude and acquiescence which they will admire will be your joy and crown. And how peaceful is death to a man thus familiarized to it, and who has been expecting its approach for years! It is sweet like the evening of a long summer day, when a solemn stillness is gathering over the world—when the clouds are gilded by the departing sun, and the air is cooled by falling dew.

3. Consider what superior advantages you have for obtaining this temper and conduct, in comparison with what Barzillai had. Think how pleasant the views are which the Gospel hath taught you to take of death. Jesus, whose appearance was seen in the days of this good man afar off, hath come, and by death hath destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered them who, through fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage. Terrors which then haunted the vale of death have now vanished away. What an example of patient suffering have you had set before you in the Man of Sorrows! And if he endured the cross in perfect meekness, shall you complain of your light afflictions? Consider, too, how by the cross of Christ the world is crucified to you and you to the world. You have seen, that when all the kingdoms of the

world, and the glory of them, were offered to the Redeemer, they were nobly scorned. You have in Christ's conduct to his mother, a specimen of filial piety of the most beautiful kind: and this is a thought which makes the grave a desirable habitation, not only that it is the place where your fathers are lying, but that it is the place where the Lord lay; and that if you are planted in the likeness of Christ's death, you shall be planted in the likeness of his resurrection.

Be humbled then on account of your deficiency in this character amid such advantages, and implore those influences of the Spirit of God which will strengthen in you the faith that overcomes the world, and the love which desires to depart, and to be with Christ, as what is far better.

To those in middle life I would recommend the culture of this spirit. How long have you to live that you should form so many schemes, and engage in so many enterprises for worldly gain, as if you were sure that you would carry them all into execution? "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow; for what is your life? it is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live, and do this or that."* How long have you to live, that you should promise yourselves a long series of earthly pleasure? Remember the man who said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat,

* James iv. 13—15.

drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* How long have you to live that you should indulge in sloth and indolence, saying, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep?" How long have you to live that you should be so sluggish in working out your salvation? for the night cometh in which no man can work.

If the aged are to be patient under their infirmities, much more should you be so under the ailments you may be visited with. They have no hope of relief from their frailties till death brings it; they have every reason to suppose that they will be aggravated; but you expect days of vigorous health, and that you shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. You are now immersed in the bustle of the world; take heed lest your chief toil be for the meat that perisheth, but labour for that which endureth to everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you. Let not your most active days be all devoted to the world. Amidst the connexions that are rising up around you, forget not your father and your mother. Show that, amidst the engagements of the world, you cannot neglect them: and, amidst your labours to promote the temporal interests of your children, teach them the good and the right way, and commend them to the Lord by whom you believed.

Finally, This subject is rich in instruction to the

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* Luke xii. 19, 20.

young. How long have you to live, that you should neglect the great salvation? Many a grave-stone can tell you how often death and youth have met; or, if you will not go to such a scene of solemn admonition, be warned by the fading blossom that meets you in the scene of beauty. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.

To you the honours and pleasures of the world appear in their fairest attractions; and you think that they deserve and will reward your pursuit; but these splendours are but a gilded vapour, and that crown of rose-buds is thickly set with thorns. I mean not that you are to be indifferent about your worldly interests, but I say, "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness of it, and all other things shall be added to you." The idea of being burdensome to your parents should be painful to you. Much they have done for you already, and you ought not, for one moment longer than is necessary, to lean on them. It is most disgraceful to behold young men, qualified to earn their bread in a respectable business or profession, in the spirit of indolence lounging at home, making use of the meanest pretexts to justify their sloth, and abusing the indulgence of their parents for its gratification. It is peculiarly shameful in the young, whose spirit might be supposed to be more independent, to fasten themselves to others, and to act as parasites from selfish motives. Why should you owe to another what you can procure for yourselves? Beware of that vain glory to which youth is so prone. Be clothed with humility,

which is the loveliest attire of the young; and in your warm affections let your parents have their due share. They may be still with you; but remember that they are returning to their earth, and that the grave which closes on them shall open for you. A parent's curse or a parent's blessing is before you. O live with them so as that your flesh may rest with them in hope, and your spirits may mingle with theirs in glory!

DISCOURSE IV.

THE CLAIMS OF WIDOWS.

1 Timothy v. 3. *Honour widows that are widows indeed.*

It is a beautiful arrangement of Providence, that while the relations of life open a sphere for the exercise of various graces and virtues, the dissolution of those connexions calls forth principles into operation which could not have been exemplified with such lustre or utility in any other circumstances. Men under the impulse of caprice may leave that which they have reared to perish through their neglect, or may destroy it in the rage of malignant passion: but whatever superficial observers may suppose, or whatever the mind may suggest under the influence of gloomy forebodings and of disappointed hope, respecting the procedure of the Almighty, he wounds the heart to form it to penitence and devotion; and calls us to new scenes of action, that pious utility may show more abundantly the power of his grace, and mild resignation the efficacy of his consolations. It is thus apparent how dear our religious improvement is to the Father of goodness, and that for this purpose his wisdom and his love regulate the various changes of our condition.

The relation of husband and wife was formed by God, to excite those thus united to love and to good

works; and the separation which death produces hath led to the display of a faith and patience of the noblest order. Thus, also, an opportunity is afforded for the exercise of charity in its best modifications, in the relief of those whom sorrow hath bowed down, and for the improvement of our own hearts in sobriety and compassion. We are led to these remarks by the character and by the precept in the text. Widows formed a numerous class in the primitive church; and the Apostle felt himself called upon to state to them their appropriate duties, and to others the respect which they owed them. We will not wonder at the favour with which persons of this class regarded the gospel, when we consider the light which it sheds on a future state, and the sympathy it provides for the mourners, and contrast this with the uncertainty as to another life in which heathenism left them, and the cold and selfish spirit which it breathed.

In this discourse I shall call your attention, in the first place, to the spirit and character of the true widow, and shall then explain the honour here enjoined to be paid to her.

I. Let us then consider the spirit and character of the true widow. The accuracy and fidelity of the Apostle are apparent in the moral discrimination with which he delineates their characters, to whom the privileges and the consolations he is describing pertain; and while he encourages the humble and the timid, he represses the presumptuous with due severity. The widow he recommends to the countenance of the church, is one whose character is such as entitles her to it.

1. She is one who is properly affected with the afflictive circumstances of her lot. There are many things which render the death of a husband a great calamity. The loss of his conversation and counsels, his sympathy and kindness, the loss of his exertions to support, gratify, and bless a family, for whose happiness he seemed to live, calls up feelings of strong and bitter regret. The path over which his partner walked with him had its difficulties, but these were smoothed by his care; while every beautiful scene through which it led was enhanced by the delight which it gave him. Now her path appears dark and lonely, full of perils which she must encounter alone; and where it may present spots of verdure and fragrance, they can only be seen through her tears.

The removal of a husband often brings with it the termination of that intercourse with others which contributes to enliven and to improve. The hasty visit of condolence is soon paid, and she is left to feel her desolation; nay, it not unfrequently happens that those most obliged by the hospitality and the good offices of a husband are the first to desert his family. The neglect of the selfish and the ungrateful renders reflection on the kindness of him who is no more still more painful. She feels that now her sorrows and fears must be shut up in her own heart. Happy is it when the full heart is relieved in the sweet and safe disclosures of devotion!

If the widow is left with children, many bitter anxieties and fears are suggested respecting their course and lot in the world; she is afraid that her control will be too feeble for the violent, that her

inexperience will unfit her for giving suitable warnings and counsels as to the snares and difficulties of life; while she feels that she cannot employ the methods which their father might have used for establishing them in the world, or securing them the countenance of others.

8. She is one who is mortified to the gaieties and dissipations of life. This is clearly intimated by the Apostle, when he contrasts her with one that lives in pleasure, and who is dead while she liveth. The death of a husband is an event fitted to produce the most solemn impressions of the uncertainty and the emptiness of all earthly enjoyments, and of the nearness of his partner to death and judgment. The presence and the happiness of those we love is the principal charm in every scene of enjoyment; and when they are snatched from it, all seems covered with bleakness and gloom. It is impossible for a serious mind to avoid reflecting in such circumstances how near the fatal dart was to her heart, how cold that heart is which took so lively an interest in her welfare, and that the body is covered with worms and corruption to which she delighted to minister. So obvious is this, that levity in one thus bereaved is considered as an outrage on decency and feeling; and when the weeds of the widow are seen in the circles of amusement, a displeasure is felt and expressed of which it must be painful to be the object.

Some have thus braved public opinion, and rushed into the follies of the world, as if they were determined to have their share in every joy. How frivolous are the apologies which are made for such con-

duct? Is it said by any one, Why should I be debarred from the pleasures which others are permitted to enjoy freely? God hath in a peculiar manner called you to weeping and to mourning, and to girding with sackcloth, and can make the scene of grief the most beneficial to your soul of all those through which you have passed. To you the consolations of religion, the calm satisfactions of wisdom, and the pleasures of beneficence are open. Or is youth urged as an apology for such gaieties? It should be remembered, that it reflects little credit on their affectionate dispositions, when the severest pang which can be given to the glowing heart is thus slightly felt, and thus speedily forgotten.

It has been urged by some in this state, as an excuse for frequenting such scenes, that they go to them as the guardians of their children; but, however your indulgence may gratify them at present, it will lessen you in their eyes when they come to the years of sober reflection; and nothing will tend more strongly to excite them to break through every restraint hereafter which may impede their pursuit of pleasure, than the recollection of your example, and of that eagerness for gay enjoyment which the most solemn events could not repress. Your conduct will teach them not self-denial, but to seek pretexts for indulgence, and to be easily satisfied with them. Or does any one say that a departed husband was such in temper and conduct that there is little reason to regret his removal? There are few so depraved as to be without all claim to esteem; and if he was utterly profligate, and died so, there are thoughts of horror suggested by this

consideration which may make you walk softly all the days of your life in the bitterness of your spirit.

8. The title of a widow indeed is peculiarly applicable to those who are left in indigent circumstances. This is the case with many widows; the death of a husband brings with it the loss of all their means of support. From the scantiness of his earnings he found it impossible to lay up aught for the time to come; or the little he had saved had been expended in the support of his family during his illness; or perhaps he had lodged it in the hands of a person in whose integrity he put entire confidence, and who hath cruelly deceived him. No words are too strong which can be employed in condemning his conduct who wastes the earnings of the industrious in extravagant living or foolish speculations, and renders them utterly destitute in their days of darkness. The institutions which have been framed by benevolent ingenuity in our day, for the custody and progressive increase of the savings of the poor, are admirably calculated to encourage among them a prudent economy, and leave those without excuse who are defrauded by any specious deceiver. Some widows have been left with a number of children so young as to be utterly unable to do aught for themselves; and how little can a mother do for them? It was the wish and the prayer of their father that he might be spared to see them educated and established in the world; but Providence had determined otherwise. In such circumstances a mother must not abandon herself to despair, and do nothing; for all that she can accomplish must be attempted. The kindness of the

humane is put forth with peculiar readiness to aid the efforts of the willing mind, and every year will lighten your burden in its course.

Other widows have lost their husbands when they were infirm and sickly, and were thus unable to do aught for their own subsistence. It was, perhaps, much more likely that they should be called away than their husbands; yet these are taken and they are left. To human view it may seem that the feeble and delicate should be least missed; but the wisdom of God often leaves us most helpless in appearance, that his strength may be made perfect in weakness. It is when earthly props are gone, that his own hand is most clearly seen and most strongly felt.

Some have been left with children labouring under disease, requiring all their time and all their care, and have been thus precluded from every exertion for their support. Health is the greatest earthly blessing of the poor, and when feeble and sickly children arise in their families it loads them with burdens in spite of all a husband's activity. But how much more pitiable is the case when the support and the care of such children is left to imbitter the griefs of the widow, and when she returns from the grave of a husband to attend her offspring to theirs!

Nay, some widows have been left under heavy debts, of the extent of which they were not aware till the death of a husband; and thus the trial is aggravated by the idea most painful to an honourable mind, that others are deprived of their due, that they have no prospect of liquidating their obligations, and

that they and their children are left to the mercy of creditors. How bitter is the regret felt by an upright heart in such circumstances, that they had not submitted to greater privations, that death in taking away a husband might not have left so grievous a load!

4. She is one that habitually trusts in God. Let thy widows trust in me is his language; and most gracious are the characters under which he has revealed himself, and sweet are the promises which he has made to encourage that trust. The widow's judge and stay is Jehovah in his holy habitation. In heaven he is known as the happiness and the glory of angels, and of the just made perfect; but even there he is known in the visits which he makes, the consolation which he dispenses, and the thanksgivings which rise to his throne as the friend of all who are desolate on earth, and as blessing the scenes of patient and lonely suffering beyond all that the world presents.

Consider how he promises power to the faint, protection to the helpless, fellowship to the solitary, consolation to the afflicted, and encouragement to the fearful. He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. The world makes few promises to the poor and to the friendless; all that its comforters have to urge is soon said, and said in tones of carelessness or impatience; but what a variety of promises are made to such in the word of God! and such is the kindness and the suitableness by which they are characterized,

that the heart feels, in the very reading of them, its confidence won, and that in the accomplishment of them its comfort is secured.

Now the pious widow trusts in these characters and promises, and believes that all that is needful for her and hers shall be bestowed in the fit season; and this confidence tranquillizes her heart. Looking to human aid is necessarily accompanied with many anxieties and fears; but looking to God, so rich in mercy, and so mighty in power, banishes at once despondency and terror. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God." She beholds in God a care that never slumbers, a love which never waxes cold, a sufficiency incapable of diminution, a power which never decays, and a life that cannot die. Sweet to the heart beyond all that the world ever uttered, or the wordling ever felt, is that one gracious assurance, "Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name: and thy Redeemer the holy one of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called."* However happy her connexion might be with an earthly husband, she had found it imbittered by the anxieties and fears produced by his illness, and by the sad scenes arising from his removal; but in her union with the Most High she feels her relation to One who is all-sufficient and eternal, whose sympathy no succession of grief can exhaust, and who, amidst the world's neglect, is ever mindful of his covenant.

* Isaiah liv. 5.

5. Habitual devotion is another character of the widow indeed. She continues in supplications and prayers night and day. Instead of the lamentation of a peevish and murmuring spirit, she pours forth the voice of prayer; and, instead of imagining, according to the gloomy fancies of despair, that she is doomed to utter wretchedness, she waits for the salvation of God. Her devotion is not that which seeks to be seen of men, but, amidst the loneliness and silence of the night, she lifts her cry to God. The lonely spot and the calm hour are sought by the mourner for intercourse with Heaven; and though to many of her acts of devotion her children are witnesses, because in these she wishes them to feel an interest and to bear a part, others of them are performed while they are slumbering beside her. In such seasons a feeble and superstitious mind, dwelling so much on the grave and on futurity, has been distracted by vain terrors; but the enlightened and pious mourner feels the protecting presence of the best of beings. Nor is it that temporary elevation of the heart which is the mere result of affliction, and which is soon succeeded by utter forgetfulness of God, or the occasional use of a languid form; she "continues in it;" she feels hourly occasion for prayer, and the consoling influence of this exercise. How beautiful is the piety of Anna, who, though a widow of fourscore and four years, departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.* Old age had not rendered her devotion languid, nor did she deem her

* Luke ii. 37.

infirmities an excuse for absence from the house of prayer. And such is the spirit of the pious widow in all ages; nothing lightens her burdens and encourages her heart like prayer. She feels the blessed reality of that assurance, "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your request known to God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* Closed is that ear which used to listen with such readiness to her request; but Jehovah's ears are open to her cry, and the prayer of the destitute he surely will regard. Let it not be supposed that because her prayers for the recovery of her sick husband were not heard, she will feel no confidence in God as the hearer of prayer; for she is conscious that her requests were answered in the bestowal of better blessings than life, even in the heavenly consolation and blessed hope in which her husband died, and in the resignation and faith in which she has been enabled to submit to the stroke. No extremity of exertion can make her restrain prayer, and no attention paid to her welfare by the compassionate around her can induce her to desist from imploring God's countenance above all. How different is such a woman from the vain talker or the severe satirist! The exercise of devotion tends to cherish mildness of temper, and that humbling sense of our own insufficiency and dependence, which cannot fail to repress all confidence in the flesh. Believing that her heavenly Father

* Phil. iv. 6, 7.

knows what things she hath need of, she trusts him for all; and a person thus addicted to habitual prayer to God is not likely to be a clamorous suppliant to others. Some have been led to prayer by the desolation of their comforts, and all have felt enlargement in it by the impulse of calamity. The best prayers of the good have been made in the vale of tears.

6. She is one who was distinguished by goodness in her happier days. I do not assert that a widow in poor circumstances is to be neglected, because in her married state she had no habits either of frugality or kindness; but I mean to state, that they have peculiar claims to the countenance of the good, who, as the Apostle states in this chapter, are well reported for good works, who have brought up children, lodged strangers, washed the saints' feet, relieved the afflicted, and diligently followed every good work. The remembrance of the wealth and splendour of her former lot will only give comfort to the mourner, and excite pity in others, if they have been employed in the service of mercy.

The widow who is left in affluent circumstances will still exercise the beneficence she practised during the life of her husband; she wants the companion with whom she used to visit the poor and the desolate; but the heart is soothed by the thought, that she is in the scenes where his compassion flowed, and that in d of love he will rejoice in her labours of Some of the acts of beneficence specified aracter of the widow in this chapter were o the usages of the primitive times; but the hem actuates the disciples of the compas-

sionate Redeemer in all ages, and what misery they can they will relieve, what comfort they can they will impart.*

Some widows are left in such poverty that they are obliged to discontinue the alms they before gave to the needy; but, like her who cast her mite into the treasury, the good will still do somewhat for the comfort of those who are more destitute than themselves. There is a variety of ways in which such persons may promote the good of the distressed in body or in mind; but acts of this kind will only be practised with readiness, skill, and perseverance, where the habit of doing them has been acquired in the season of pros-

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"* It is a tribute due to her memory, says a historian of the church, to mention the illustrious female who first founded hospitals. Fabiola, a Roman Christian, sold her estate, built an hospital, the first that ever was erected, in which she maintained and cured the sick, the miserable, and the infirm. Many of these were brought together, and it was her unceasing care to attend and to relieve them; loathsome as the task would appear to the sickly sentiment which often assumes the language of feeling and virtue." Let me give another illustration of the courage and power of female mercy from our own times. At Chartres, the prison being crowded to excess, it became necessary to confine a band of robbers in the subterranean vaults of a church. Here a contagious malady soon manifested itself, and several died. None had ventured to penetrate this abyss of misery, and the prisoners were daily becoming victims of disease, when Mademoiselle de Farge, with true heroism, descended alone with assistance to the sick, and from that period devoted her labours to the succour of distressed criminals.

It would be most unjust were we not to add to such names that of Mrs Fry, who has shown the meek and quiet spirit of her sect, in beautiful association with the most active charity, and who has, in scenes the most trying to female delicacy, laboured by the counsels of wisdom, by the law of kindness, and by a well-directed bounty, to bring to repentance, to comfort, and to salvation, the most wretched victims of vice. The blessings of those who were ready to perish have come upon her.

perity. It is in such persons that the unhappy will place most confidence, and they will hope that, amidst all the distresses of their own lot, they will take a compassionate interest in their calamity.

There is a general tendency in men, when any calamity falls upon their neighbours, to remember and to judge of their previous conduct. It is then that ample justice is done to the bountiful. The character of beneficence sheds a mild lustre over the house of mourning, which cheers even those who are sitting amidst its gloom. Charity hath thus its reward, even where the means of its bounty have passed away; and the consciousness that no more can be given enhances the value of what hath been obtained.

II. Let us now consider the honour which is to be paid them. This implies sympathy, respect, assistance when necesary, and employing them in promoting the welfare of others.

1. The precept in the text requires sympathy. The commandment of Christ requires this feeling, and the expression of it in every suitable mode of condolence to every sufferer. The connexion in which we stand to our fellow-creatures, as members of the great family of man, and to our fellow Christians as children of the same Father of Mercies, points to mutual sympathy as the proper spirit of both relations. It is by this temper that the selfishness, the vanity, and the presumption of the prosperous are checked; and the sorrows of life, by being thus divided, are alleviated in the happy experience of the afflicted. In the exercise of this temper we are to look around us, and

seek out the scene where the rod of the Almighty is resting.

Sympathy should always be proportioned to the nature of the calamity which befalls others, and to the circumstances which aggravate it. A considerate mind will see much in the case of the widow to excite its compassion. Those who have met with this trial, and who, after the lapse of years, feel that the heart still knoweth its own bitterness, will be disposed to commiserate those who have seen a husband carried forth to his grave, and who are saying, "Call me Mara, for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me."

Those who are happy in the society of affectionate husbands, may consider what would be their state if God should bereave them of such partners, and thus judge of the widow's calamity. Even the youngest can form an idea of it by the grief they feel at the loss of a beloved companion, or by the pang which the apprehension of it produces.

Sympathy hath a wonderful power to solace the afflicted heart; and is felt in the house of mourning as the sweetest earthly consolation. Let none then approach that house with the air of indifference, or the frivolous talk of the day, but in the exercise of a patient, active, and tender compassion. How beautiful was the sympathy shown by our Saviour to the widow at Nain, following the corpse of her only son to the grave, a son in whom she had, we may suppose, often traced with delight the image and the virtues and the kindness of his father, and who, in this hour of darkness, felt that she was now sunk in utter de-

solation! When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.*

2. It requires from us respect. There are some who indulge in a light way of talking of those whom God hath thus tried, and who think they show their wit and their knowledge of human nature, by predicting the levities of conduct which will soon succeed the burst of sorrow. There is much malignity in this conduct, and no person of right feeling can be entertained by such cruel sarcasms. When sarcastic ridicule is directed against the gay and the prosperous, they move in scenes where it is soon forgotten, and they are surrounded by flatterers who sooth their irritated vanity by compliments to them, and by invectives against their enemies; but the mourner has no defence against the scoffer, and the heart, roused to the acutest sensibility by the bereavement it has experienced, is alive to every look and to every word of insult. In whatever form it is presented, every insinuation of this kind should be repressed, and the hopes of charity should be maintained and expressed in opposition to it.

There is one beneficial purpose which such petulant and unfeeling sallies may be made to serve, though for it no gratitude is due to the head or the heart of the scorner; they may excite to that circumspection, for the want of which, in their condition, no agreeable qualities will atone. Happy is the person that feareth alway; he escapes the snares and the mortifications of the rash and the sanguine.

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* Luke vii. 12—15.

With the loss of the situation which a husband occupied, the respect expressed for his family often passes away; and many treat with utter neglect, or are ready to insult by airs of superiority, or of affected condescension, those whom they once approached with the utmost deference, and whose notice they were eager to secure. The loss of such respect will not pain a considerate mind: it was paid not to merit, but to station, and was the result, not of true esteem, but of the basest sycophancy.

A good heart will to such families increase instead of diminishing respectful attentions, and will feel that excellence in spirit and conduct in such a calamity strengthens the claim of the widow to veneration. It may be proper to remark on this part of the subject, that there is a jealous pride which prompts some to consider themselves as neglected and slighted when nothing of this kind was intended, and that such a feeling should be repressed by all who value their own peace, or who wish that their calamity should produce its proper fruits.

3. The precept requires that aid be given to them where it is necessary. Charity to the poor of all descriptions is inculcated by the law of Christ; but it is not to be shown to them all in the same form, or in the same measure; their circumstances and character must be wisely considered, and where most is needed most ought to be given. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction is the first expression of that spirit of love which religion forms and perfects. Charity to this class of sufferers is not liable to the objections which have been sometimes

urged against the claims of others. Sometimes deception is suspected, and it is supposed that an appearance of misery is assumed where there are the means of comfortable subsistence; but in the case of widows such pretexts can seldom be adduced. The circumstances of a family are laid open at the death of its head; and, if they are not, it is not amidst the sorrows of the heart which such a scene produces, that we can suppose any imposition practised. When persons have fallen into poverty, as the result of imprudent speculation, extravagant modes of living, or criminal conduct, it is said that to relieve such families, under sufferings arising from this source, is to encourage folly and vice; but in the case of widows the calamity is the result of the stroke of an Almighty hand. It may be said that the husband ought to have saved from his earnings what might have done something to support his family; but in many cases this is impracticable, even with the severest toil and the most rigid parsimony.

Peculiar delicacy is necessary in ministering to the wants of those who have seen better days, and who once imagined that no such lot as dependence should ever be theirs. The best of all modes of relief is to put such widows into situations where they may support themselves; and those who can give no assistance for this purpose, may be useful by applying to them for the articles which they dispose of, and by inducing others to give them their countenance in this form. We are ready to suppose that widows thus struggling to provide for a destitute family, things honest in the sight of all, could not be the objects of envy or oppo-

sition, yet it is too true that some, from a selfish dread of loss to themselves or their friends, have depreciated their commodities, and misrepresented their transactions, and the motives of those who support them. Truth as well as charity requires the exposure of such infamous arts. It has sometimes happened that, in spite of all widows can do by attention and courtesy to secure public favour, they have been unable to gain it; and have had the bitterness of disappointment, and the harsh reflections of those who had befriended them, added to their sorrows. Nay, there have been some who have imposed on their simplicity and goodness, and taken articles on trust with the most sacred assurances of payment, and yet have never made the least effort to discharge the debt. This is a robbery of the widow, and that too under the mask of favour, and is in the sight of God a most heinous crime.

Where widows have young children, it is an act of true charity to educate them, and to put them to suitable employments. It is proper that their education and employment should be adapted to their capacity, and to the sphere in which they would have moved had their father lived. There has been among the fatherless, in the lowest circumstances, a genius which tuition might have formed to high celebrity in the arts, or in literature. Some have, through the discrimination and liberality of patrons, acquired a high place in science, and more might have done so had they been thus favoured.

And when widows must receive from the public funds of the church, the allowance should be as liberal as possible, though in no circumstances can it be ex-

pected to preclude the bounty of their neighbours, or their own exertions. In the daily ministrations of the primitive church the widows were the principal recipients; and it was that none might be neglected, and that no partiality might be shown in the distribution, that seven deacons were appointed to manage it. Such persons are its fittest objects; and while her deacons should frown on the applications of indolence and imposture, to those of the poor widow they should lend a ready ear.

4. The precept enjoins our employing them to promote the welfare of others. It has a primary reference to the employment of aged females in the days of the Apostle as teachers of poor children, and to the intrusting them with the care of entertaining Christian strangers. This was a striking proof of the confidence reposed by the church in their prudence, piety, and activity. There were widows in those days whose names are mentioned in the Epistles with the greatest honour, as zealous instruments in the cause of truth and charity. The order of deaconesses has become extinct in the church. It was peculiarly necessary in the primitive times, when the introduction of a new religion was watched by multitudes eager to misrepresent its usages, and in the East, where jealousy and tyranny permit not females to hold the slightest intercourse with any beyond their own circle, that women in sickness and sorrow, in poverty and fear, should be ministered to by those of their own sex. We behold in this an admirable proof of the wisdom of the Author of our faith, and how unlike he was to enthusiasts who scorn the maxims of prudence,

and, by their indiscreet associations, lead the thoughtless into snares.

In modern times such arrangements do not exist; but in the spirit of them, matrons are employed to superintend charitable institutions, and in various places act as instructors of children. They can attend to the concerns of such institutions with a minuteness of which few men are capable; and their kindliness of manner seldom fails to win the hearts of the young. It is highly proper that persons of rank should sometimes make such widows the dispensers of their alms, or, at least, employ them in laying out their bounty. And I cannot help remarking, that the zeal of some females, in respectable situations in life, to do good to others, is not so considerate as it ought to be; as, in communicating instruction in reading and some of the arts of life, they deprive various deserving females of their scholars, on whose wages they depended for support. How much more judicious would it be to encourage such teachers by their countenance, and by the rewards they bestowed on the deserving under their charge!

There is a peculiar softness in the manner of those who have seen affliction, a greater patience in watching, and a superior aptitude for tending the sick and the infirm. These qualities have been exhibited in every town and district of the land, in the conduct of females who have gone about doing good, teaching little children to fear God, distributing the Holy Scriptures, and applying their warnings and their consolations. In a more private form, but marked by the God who sees in secret, females visit the mansions

of distress; and have found, in wiping away the tears of the unhappy, their own griefs lessened, and their own spirits revived.

We act in the spirit of this precept when the advice of such persons is solicited in cases of difficulty. The experience of the aged widow qualifies her to be a guide to the young, and her example of holy resignation, self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness, is one of the best lessons of goodness. From such persons, in their obscure and solitary dwelling, where the Bible is the chief study, and prayer to God is their hourly employment, a wisdom may be learned far more sublime than any ever taught in the most celebrated of the heathen schools; and the beauties of holiness appear in those who have long served God with peculiar lustre. The virtues and graces which adorn the character of the desolate widow will be found the loveliest accomplishments of youth and the best guards of prosperity.

CONCLUSION.

How valuable are the lessons which we are taught by the arrangements of the primitive times! Many of them were local and temporary, but the spirit of them was that of humility and beneficence. A wise and good man will never treat them with neglect as of no interest, or of no obligation, but will inquire how far they may be followed out, and what dispositions they require him to cherish. Ingenuity and benevolence united have in our country, at the present day, formed in various societies, civil and religious, institutions for the support of widows. In these plans, a man's regard

to his own is made subservient to the advantage of many, and the widow in receiving her allowance feels a satisfaction in it as the result of the foresight and exertion by which it was secured, to which the mere recipient of alms must be a stranger. It is to be wished that such institutions were more extensive and more efficient, and that in their arrangements, management, and result, they may display more of that heavenly wisdom which is full of mercy and good fruits.

Let widows be more solicitous than ever to exemplify the qualities which are the best security for respect; and let them supplicate the Spirit of grace to form and to strengthen in them the various graces of the gospel. By these they will deserve and attain respect, the respect of the wisest and the best. Let them not degrade themselves by peevish querulousness. A habit of this kind is a proof, wherever it exists, of little confidence in God, and little prayer to him. Let them remember, that respect is nearest those who neither court nor demand it. Be grateful for all the kindness you experience, and decline not any opportunity of usefulness which is presented to you; endeavour to search out means of utility; set your hearts on the honour that comes from God, and walk in his fear.

Let those who are now happy in their families remember the days of darkness. It is to act as the wise, to live as those who are to be separated in death. It is to act as Christians, to live as those who are to be re-united to heaven, and to be for ever together in that happy world. The uncertainty whose death it

may be which shall produce the separation, is an awful memento to the husband and to the wife to prepare to meet with God. It is his prerogative who brought you together to part you; and it is by dwelling together as heirs of the grace of life, that you shall be parted with his blessing. "Hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly; that sayest in thine heart, I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come on thee in their perfection."*

To the man from whom death has taken away the partner of his heart, this subject suggests many admonitions. The separation is not imbittered by poverty, as it might have been to your partner, had you been removed, and in the hurry of business, and in mingling with the world, the mind is relieved for a season from its melancholy musings; yet your heart cannot turn to your dwelling without a pang, and on going back to it from your labour in the evening, you feel that the care which ordered, the kindness which blessed, and the smile which cheered it, are no more. Shun not your home though you find it thus desolate; you will find in its recollections, however solemn, and in the discharge of the double duty which now lies on you, far more desirable solace than any scene of gaiety can afford you. How bitter are the feelings of those children to whom a mother's removal is aggravated by a father's neglect, and who say to one an-

* Isaiah xlvii. 8, 9.

other, "My mother cannot, and my father will not return to us!"

Let the excellence of temper and manners on which you so fondly dwell be copied by you, that your children may find in you a father's care and a mother's goodness united. Disgrace not yourselves, nor the memory of those who are gone, by any imprudence or folly. Be sober, be vigilant, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."*

Let the young learn to bear with patience the disappointments and the separations of early life. Companions on whom your hearts doted have been taken away from you by death. Thus God early reminds you, in opposition to the flattering conclusions of youth, that this is not your rest. Thus he teaches you, if you are spared, to form every connexion in life under the idea of its certain and speedy termination, and thus he calls you to seek in religion friendships more delightful and ties more lasting, than any this world can present. How many of the early tears of youth fall at the grave! O happy is it when its affections are directed to Him who sayeth, My son, give me thine heart, and when its pleasures are those which spring up to everlasting life!

* Psalm xxxvii. 3—6.

DISCOURSE V.

THE BEST SUPPORT IN FRAILTY.

ISAIAH xlvi. 4. *Even to your old age I am he; and even to your hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.*

NOTHING can exhibit the character of God in a more amiable point of view, than the representations which the Scriptures give us of his conduct to youth and age. Youth is ardent, thoughtless, and presumptuous. Confident in their own powers, the young are eager to engage in courses which lead to perplexity, grief, and ruin. The world tells them not to imbitter the choicest moments of life by thoughts of hereafter, and bids them not withhold their hearts from any joy. But to them God says, Wilt thou not from this time forth cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth? He will check its rashness by the restraints of wisdom, and direct its energies to action by the safest counsels. He will point its glowing affections to the noblest objects, and its pursuits to pleasures which sanctify while they bless, to riches which perish not in the using, and to honours which are bright for ever. He will guard them from companions with whom it would be unsafe to associate, and lead them to friendships conducive to wisdom and goodness. These offices he hath performed in num-

berless instances for the young; and there are many in heaven who will look back through eternity on the days of their youth as marked by a care which must be for ever first in their grateful remembrance, and by a grace which must be for ever highest in their song.

Old age needs a comforter. To its dull cold ear the voice of pity seldom speaks, and the arm on which they hoped to lean in their frailty has been withered and broken by the power of death. But to them God saith in the text, "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." The serious consideration of this text would remove from the mind that aversion and even horror with which old age is thought of by the young, and might make them welcome the frailty which is thus supported, and the hoar hairs thus crowned with loving kindness and with tender mercies. The belief of it will make aged saints not only patient, but joyful. Whatever reason they may have to complain of men, they can have none to complain of God. They are arrived at a period of life when they can do little for God; but he delighteth in mercy, and will do better for them than at their beginning, and will cause them to sing as in the days of youth.

In this discourse I shall illustrate the gracious assurances God here delivers to his aged saints, and then point out the grounds of confidence here stated, that he will act to them in this manner.

1. In illustrating the import of this gracious promise, I remark, in the first place, that it assures aged saints of God's continued presence with them;

Few of the companions of their early days remain with the aged in the last stage of their journey. Their partners in the gay sports of childhood, and in the active pursuits of business, have gone to their long home. When their engaging appearance and amiable qualities arise to their remembrance, the heart is saddened by the thought, that their beauty hath consumed in the grave from their dwelling, and that to us and to the world their accomplishments are lost. Few remain to whom they can talk of the mercies of former years. A new race has risen around them which cares little for them, and which they feel little solicitude to please. The relatives who survive, they are ready to imagine visit them from the cold impulse of duty, and are glad of any pretext to shorten their stay. The same sun which shone upon them in the days of their youth still shines on them; but how different is its influence on the languid feelings and on the freezing blood! The same spring returns which in their early days renovated the face of nature; but how different does its influence appear to the dim eye, and amidst the sad impressions of their own decay!

But the promise in the text assures them, that the Guide of their youth lives to be the companion of their age. Solitary and deserted as you may deem yourselves, yet as you stand in the churchyard, and mark around you the graves where your friends are sleeping, you may sing, "The Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." To Him you can talk of the days that are past, and thank Him for that help through which you continue

to this day. On many a scene you are disposed to write, "The glory is departed;" for none appears decked with the charms which youthful fancy beheld in it: but your God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and the longer you live he will be more kind to you than before.

I have seen aged persons who had survived all their friends. They had devoted themselves to the care of aged connexions, and for their sakes declined an advantageous settlement in life, and, amidst the anxious thoughts which arose in their minds respecting their future lot, persevered in their duty in humble trust in the divine mercy. To those who are strangers to them, it may seem that they have reason to repent their generous sacrifice, or, as others would say, their romantic folly; but God will not forget their labour of love, and to them his cheering presence and his kindest care are pledged.

2. It implies unabated affection. The aged are ready to complain, and in many cases with truth, that relatives and friends are cold to them, and weary of them. They think that they minister to them in their infirmities with reluctance, and listen to their complaints with disgust. Seldom do the soft tones of affection reach their ear, and far more frequently do they hear the language of mockery and reproach. There is something in the scowl with which their wishes are thwarted, and the taunts with which the trouble they give is stated, which has made them think that they were outcasts from every human heart. They feel that they have become less amiable to their fellow-creatures; and they fear that their mo-

ral infirmities will provoke the anger of their Father in heaven, and that their incapacity to serve him will make him say, "I have no delight in thee." The most painful of a good man's fears are of this description. They feel that with the assurance of God's love they could bear every act of unkindness from men; but when they imagine they see in their harshness that God is wroth with them, their eye trickles down, and ceases not till the Lord look down and behold from heaven.

But God having loved his own that are in the world, will love them to the end. The bloom of beauty, the elegance of form, the vivacity of spirit, and that activity of character, which made them the delight of all around them, are long since gone; and gone with them are the persons whom they attracted to your side. To man there is nothing alluring, nay, there is much that is repulsive in declining faculties, in ghastliness, and in infirmity. But the love of God to you was not founded on such perishable qualities, and with them it did not decay. He loved you for the righteousness he hath imputed to you, and for the graces he hath formed within you; and in the winter of age he sees those graces flourishing. The heart of the best of beings can never be alienated, and he will rest in his love.

In looking back on the scenes through which you have passed, you see reason to admit the truth of that proverb which once appeared so strange to the ardent and sanguine heart of youth, "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain;"* but you are more dis-

* Prov. xxxi. 30.

posed than ever to say, How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! It can animate the dullest heart and cheer the loneliest season. In the attachment with which God warms the heart of children to the aged, and the interest which they feel in their expressions of affection, they may see his solicitude for their happiness, and a kindness forming by his influence which shall attend them to the grave.

3. The promise assures aged saints of the kindest tokens of endearment from their God and Father. He will bear them in his arms as the parent does the child for whose welfare she is most solicitous, and whom she clasps to her heart as the object of her fondest love. "He shall feed his flocks like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."* When you behold the delightful tokens of a mother's tenderness to the child of her cares, you can say, Thus doth God act to my soul; his left hand is under mine head, and his right hand doth embrace me. Sometimes the aged discover a peevishness and disgust, both unbecoming and unwise, at the necessary attentions which must be paid to infants, and it would tend to produce very opposite impressions, and minister much to their own improvement and happiness, were they to regard them as emblems of the indulgence and grace of the Father of Mercies, and to say, "The love that prompts these attentions is an emblem of his pity; and sweet and delightful as they

* Is. xl. 11. Deut. xxxiii. 27.

are to the infant, they remind me of what God has promised, and of the solace which I may expect to feel in his marvellous lovingkindness. When this worn-out body can find no posture to rest in, my soul shall sweetly repose on the bosom of infinite compassion. He will wipe the tears from my shrivelled cheeks, and hush my wailings by the tenderest soothings of love."

In every kind attention which you receive you ought to mark his goodness. The face that looks to you with such benignity, and that smiles on you so sweetly, is softened by the gentleness of Christ; the lips which speak to you in such terms and tones of affection are opened by him; the arm which supports you to your chair, and the hand which smooths the bed of languishing, are impelled and guided by him; the cordial which revives the fainting heart is from his store; and the garment in which you feel so comfortable is from his wardrobe.

It was the privilege of the Apostle John, as he himself describes it:—"Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved."* In this beautiful allusion to his own peculiar privilege, we see the humility by which this apostle was so distinguished, and at the same time the delight with which his heart dwelt on his endearing intimacy with his Saviour on earth. Amidst all the events of his life this could never be forgotten. Amidst persecution, the remembrance of it was his solace; and in his exile to Patmos it was the object

* John xiii. 23.

of enlivening meditation in all its lonely scenes. But the promise in my text assures every aged saint of this happiness. To rest in Abraham's bosom is the happiness before you; but to be borne in the arms of condescending love is your honour and your bliss even at present. Nowhere does the infant smile so sweetly as in its mother's arms, and hushed are its cries when it is brought back to them; and in those of your Almighty Father you may rejoice exceedingly, and with your song you should praise him.

4. This promise assures aged believers of effectual support. Various are the burdens which the aged have to bear, and various are the duties which they are required to perform, and for which they have no might. To review a life stained with sin, and yet to sorrow over it in hope of mercy,—amid the tossings of sleepless nights to remember God on our bed, and to think on him in the night-watches,—to rejoice in the Lord amid depressing infirmities,—to be courteous to those that neglect us,—to show to those who wish to provoke us to peevishness to justify their disregard of us, that our religion teaches us to be gentle and forgiving,—to be contented while others fret,—and to say, while no friend approaches the couch or the chair where you are gasping for breath or shivering for cold, "Look on me, O Lord, and prove merciful to me as thou usest to do to them that love thy name," is such a difficult task, that you are disposed to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

In youth, saints are apt to err on the side of presumption, and in old age, on that of despondence. Remembering how difficult they have found it to re-

sist temptations, and to bear trials in what is past of their course, they shudder at the idea of meeting with more formidable ones with which they must struggle with faded strength, and these questions excite in them the most painful forebodings:—"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?"*

But the grace of God can fit you for all this and much more. He can strengthen the bending back and invigorate the fainting spirit; He will bear thee when staggering under thy load. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."† In temptation he can give thee strength, not only for resistance, but for victory; in affliction, grace to be not merely patient but cheerful; in neglect and ill usage he can enable thee, not only to exercise meekness, but to overcome evil with good; and in death he can, not merely calm thee into resignation, but elevate thee to the full assurance of hope. Upheld by his arm, and having the joy of the Lord for your strength, you shall sing in his ways; you shall carry what the vigour of youth shrinks from; and you shall run so as to leave its speed far behind. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

* Jer. xii. 5. † Is. xli. 10.

but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."* Say not then, What shall I do with this burden? Will none share it with me? Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

It is very remarkable, that this idea of Divine Support is held out in no less than three expressions of the text,—"I will carry, I will bear," and again it is said, "I will carry." You must have remarked, that, in Scripture, blessings of peculiar value, and which from various causes we are apt to think unattainable by us, are promised in a strength and solemnity of manner, and with a frequency, which affectingly indicates the condescension of Heaven to human weakness, and powerfully enforces on the timid and the feeble that gracious call—"Trust in the Lord for ever; for with the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength."

5. It assures them of his patience and indulgence. This may be intimated in the phrase—"I will bear." Men are more disposed to bear with the young than with the old. Many things are considered as extenuating the follies of youth which cannot be urged as an apology for those of age. Instead of excuse, their failings are too often aggravated in the harshest manner. Their occasional fretfulness is stigmatized as habitual bad temper, and their seasons of dejection as the result of sullenness and discontent; and the thought sometimes arises in their minds—If I am thus

* Is. xl. 30, 31.

severely dealt with by men, what will become of me if God should mark my iniquity? To him my failings of temper and conduct must be much more offensive; but the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."* If, for the sake of his Son, he hath exercised so much long-suffering towards you amidst the errors of your youth, think not that he will now enter into judgment with you. He will remember for you the plea which Jesus urged for the disciples, when you are languid where you ought to be active, and complain when you ought to be thankful—"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."†

He will correct you for these failings of age to secure their amendment, and to make your decline a more happy specimen of the beauty and the power of religion; but it will be with a gentle hand. He will dig about the aged tree, and prune it, that it may still bear fruit. In measure when it shooteth forth thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind; and he who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, tempers it also to the feeble and staggering wanderer.

6. The text contains a promise of complete deliverance. Many are the afflictions and temptations of old age, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all. He will deliver you from the disease which threatens to cut you off before the appointed time,

* Ps. ciii. 13, 14. † Matt. xxvi. 41.

and from the temptation which you fear will drive you to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. He will deliver you from the fears which harass you—from the doubts which perplex you—from the despondence which deepens the gloom of the evening of life—from the solicitude which torments you—from the carnality and worldly-mindedness which impede you so much in duty, and fill you with so much shame and grief after it—and from the society which you feel such a restraint and burden upon you. "I sought the Lord," says the Psalmist, "and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."* And saith Paul, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver."†

Ye aged saints, who are groaning under affliction, lift up your head from the staff where it leans, from the pillow where it rests, and view your redemption drawing nigh. Say not, "What is to become of me in old age? What though God do all that you have said to me, if he leaves me then, my grey hairs may be left without a shelter, and my failing heart without a hope." This God is your God for ever and ever. He will be your guide even unto death; and he who is with you to old age will be with you to eternity. The deliverances which you have already obtained

* Psalm xxxiv. 4. 6. † 2 Cor. ix. 10.

are pledges of that complete salvation which awaits you at death—a salvation that shall leave no stain on your robes, and no corruption in your heart—no tear in the eye, and no evil in the lot; nay, it is a salvation which shall render your robes all white, and your hearts all holy, your countenances all bright, and your lot all blissful. It is a salvation which shall give you everlasting strength for decay, the perfection of beauty for wrinkles, perpetual service for inactivity, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Human life is like a hill. Its sunny side we climb in childhood and youth; in middle life we loiter a while on its summit; in old age we descend its dark side, and at its foot lies the valley of the shadow of death. The staff which supported your decrepitude shall help you in your dying agony; the rod which drove enemies from your course shall terrify them from your pillow; yea, the Comforter of your age shall take you to himself, that in him you may find the bliss of eternity.

III. Let us now consider the grounds of confidence in these promises which the text presents, that God will do all this to his aged people.

1. God hath made. His creating goodness is frequently employed in Scripture as an encouragement unique in his protecting care. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with

thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."* It is on this account that he, in wonderful patience, protects and supports the aged sinner who has lived for scores of years without God in the world. This he doth because he hath a respect to the work of his hands; and shall he neglect and abandon his aged saints, whom his hand not only formed, but the blood of his Son hath redeemed? In your failing flesh, and in your mind, though its faculties are decaying, he beholds the purchase of his Son, and that must produce a peculiar interest in you.

Besides, you are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. To point out the total change effected in conversion, and that this is the sole result of Divine agency, we are told, that "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new."† The principles of grace are not formed in perfection as were the works of nature; but they are not on that account to be viewed as less valued by him, and less the object of his care; nay, they are more so, from their moral nature and heavenly destiny. He cannot disregard the temple where his Spirit dwells, nor give up to unpitied sorrow the children of his special love. The withering plant, which in its opening blossom was the object of anxious nurture, and in its full beauty of the most vigilant care, is, in the season of decay, suffered to waste away un-

* Isaiah xliii. 1, 2. † 2 Cor. v. 17.

heeded; but Jesus sees in the plant of grace beauties as interesting in the autumn as in the spring of life; yes, though it may want the gay blossoms which youth gave, it hath fruits in maturity which it could not then have, even the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. The parental relation is frequently employed in Scripture to hold forth the connexion which God hath with his people; and most beautifully does it represent that assimilation to him in love and purity by which they are characterized, that tender sympathy with which he regards their feeble and helpless state, and that unwearied care with which he ministers to them. Thus, in melting tenderness, he saith, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."*

2. The character of him who makes the promise confirms it. What is the reason why the word "I" is five times repeated in this verse? It is to point out the pleasure God takes in making promises of mercy to his aged people, and to fix their view on the Author of it, that they may confide more fully in its accomplishment. Who says this?—I the Almighty; and he who upholds all things by the word of his power cannot want ability to strengthen the weak hands and to confirm the feeble knees. It is the God who delights in mercy; and the consolation and sup-

* Isaiah xlix. 15, 16.

port of the aged in their sorrow must be an act in which he will take pleasure. It is the faithful God, who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. It is the omniscient God, who knows the many infirmities of age, tells all its wanderings, and puts its tears into his bottle. It is the omnipresent God, whose eyes run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them that fear him. He can visit with his salvation the neglected corner where you sit, and while you move along with slowness and with difficulty, and the impatience of youth murmurs that it must wait for you, you can say, "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand." It is the unchangeable God, with whom, amidst all the changes you lament, and all the decays you feel, there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. How beautifully does Jeremiah sooth his grief by the remembrance of this immutable goodness in a scene of desolation which left all but piety without hope! "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."* It is the holy God who intends to advance your sanctification by the infirmities of age, and who will make the moment when death consigns you to corruption the period when your souls shall be satisfied with his likeness.

The greatest promises, if made by those destitute of power to fulfil them, excite contempt; or, if made by persons whose integrity is questionable, they are thought of with the torturing anxieties of suspicion,

* Lam. iii. 22.

rather than the comforts of hope; but in God we see every thing to make distrust appear foolish and criminal, and to produce a steadfast and triumphant faith. "For all the promises of God are in Christ yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."*

Without Divine support the most intelligent and powerful of creatures cannot stand; with it the feeblest shall not fail; even under severe and lengthened affliction. Angels, when left to themselves, fell in the midst of heaven, and man, when left to himself, fell in the midst of paradise; but while we may point to these mournful instances of imbecility and presumption in the creature, we can look to many aged persons whom no temptation could seduce, and no calamity could overwhelm, and who shall be eternal monuments of his grace, in whom saints of all ages find peace and strength.

CONCLUSION.

1. This subject is admirably adapted to lead the aged to their proper duties. It should lead them to love God with all their heart and with all their strength. The reflection, I am poor and needy, but the Lord thinks on me, is powerfully adapted to melt the heart. Let it be with higher wonder and gratitude than ever that you sing, "His mercy endureth for ever." Surrounded by angels who excel in strength, and active in serving him, he cares for me, though I am feeble and useless like the bruised reed. He wipes these failing eyes, he gives power to these

* 2 Cor. i. 20.

trembling knees, and shall not I devote the life he thus supports to his service? Your capacities of service are more limited than they once were; but this consideration should make you more zealous in the holy improvement of them. His service requires and it deserves the first, and the best, and the last of our time.

Let it teach you patience. You cannot surely complain of the roughness of the path which God doth so much to smooth; and why does he leave any inequalities in it, but that patience may so have its perfect work in you, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing? Complain not that man does so little for you when God doth so much. There is a beauty in patience which never fails to please; and what can be said of no earthly distinction, of no worldly accomplishment, and of no natural attraction, is true of it, that the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.

Let it teach you to be joyful. We expect not from the old the vivacity or the transports of youth; but the goodness of God should make you not only tranquil but happy, and call from your lips the grave sweet melody of praise. "He is a happy old man," is language which is seldom heard of the aged; but when it is employed, it is spoken with an affection and heard with an interest truly delightful. A person on the point of closing all the trials of life, and arrived at the threshold of heaven, may well be happy.

Be not weary of a season thus marked by the Divine pity and care. An aged saint thus expressed himself to a minister who came to visit him in his

frailty:—"I am lying here a poor useless creature. Oh that I were taken to heaven, where I might have it in my power to do something to glorify God!" To this the minister replied, "You may glorify God here by resignation and patience, and that too in the face of many difficulties and distresses. Angels and saints in heaven have not your burdens to bear; your praise, therefore, is more wonderful, and is, I trust, as acceptable to God." At the same time cling not to this life, as if in it only you had hope in Christ. That aged saint, of whom I have now been speaking, joined one Sabbath some young persons who were sitting on a grave in the interval of public worship, and said, "How happy will I be when you are sitting on my grave! I rejoice to think that I shall soon be with Christ in paradise." It were good if conversation in church-yards at that season were always of this serious cast; and never should it be disgraced by worldly details or idle disputation.

In the country, the intervals of public worship are spent by many in the church-yard; and though the previous service might be presumed to have disposed them for sober reflection, though the graves of those once their fellow-worshippers are stretched around them, and though they are on the spot which they have destined to receive their dust, yet how little is said or felt suited to such a scene! You shall soon be brought to the church-yard, not to quit it till you leave it either for heaven or for hell.

2. Let the conduct of God to the aged be imitated by us as far as is possible. Give them as much of your company as duty and prudence will admit, and

let not your regard to them wax cold, though you may perceive in them increasing infirmities. Give them every proper testimony of your kindness. Shrink not from the touch of the withered hand, for it will remind you of the grasp of death. Grudge not the attention that is necessary to keep the aged clean and comfortable. Neglect of them will bring its own punishment in your disgusts and uneasy reflections, and in the indignation and reproach of all around you. When I see, as I sometimes do, an aged parent resting his head on the shoulder of his son or daughter, or gently borne by them from his bed to the fireside, that change of place and conversation may refresh him, I behold what these dutiful children may expect when their evil days shall come, and the kindness of that Providence displayed which finds for the helplessness of infancy a refuge in the parents' bosom, and for the helplessness of age a refuge in their children's arms. I have seen the daughter-in-law as solicitous for the comfort of an old man placed under her care as her husband, and, amidst the duties required by a numerous family, treating him with uniform respect and kindness. I have heard the old man blessing God for bringing so good a heart to his dwelling, declaring that he loved her as his own child, and of his directing to her his last request and benediction. What an honour does not such a tribute shed on the temper and conduct of such a relative! Though you cannot deliver them from their troubles, you may obtain this by your prayers, and your attentions will make them lighter than they would have been.

Your own hearts will suggest many motives to these duties; but I may say, Remember that charity, the spirit of the Most High, beareth all things and endureth all things. It is an imitation of God in a very amiable part of his character and procedure. Be followers of God as dear children, and walk in love. It is a working together with him. The kindnesses of friends and neighbours are the instruments which God often employs in fulfilling the promise in the text. The eye of sympathy drops with his compassion, the hand of attention ministers with his care, and the voice of friendship speaks with his love.

I shall only add, as another motive to this conduct, that thus you may hope that when you come to old age, the Lord will requite you as you have done to others. Those who have made the aged unhappy by their neglect and cruelty, have had their own hearts pierced by the harsh speeches and barbarous usage of sons and daughters of Belial; while the dutiful and the affectionate to declining relations have found, that in upholding their weakness they were preparing a prop for their own, and that, in brightening the gloom of age, light is sown for the righteous.

Finally, Let aged transgressors consider, that none of these consolations is theirs, and that they exclude themselves from them by their temper and conduct. Nor is this all that can be said about your unhappiness, for there are many positive miseries about the sinner's age. That God whom you have so long disregarded lives to call you to account for all that you have done; and his indignation against sin is as incapable of diminution as his love to his people. The

wrath of God abideth on you, and no hand can remove it but that of the atoning Saviour. In the distresses which imbitter your old age you may see the tokens of his anger. Your nights are wakeful, for he debars your eyes from sleep; your flesh is pained, because his arrows stick fast within you. Instead of having reason to expect his help under your burdens, he may lay on you the most grievous load of all others, the sense of unpardoned guilt, the apprehensions of eternal misery. The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? Youth in all its vigour would wither and perish under this load; and can your heart and flesh endure it? In a short time God will take you from the frailties of age, but it will be to deliver you to the pains of hell. The sins of a long life must be answered for; they require a furnace seven times heated, and they shall have it. "Double unto her double, according to her works, in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double."* You have seen the agonies of the suffering infant; and did not the thought strike you, "If original sin is thus punished, what do the wilful transgressions of a long life deserve? If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" O! let these terrors of the Lord rouse you! Your opportunities of salvation are almost gone, and you are within a step of the last. Now or never you must repent and believe the Gospel. Let not your feeble hands bear any longer the weapons of rebellion, or your failing heart be any longer at enmity against God.

* Rev. xviii. 6.

Polluted and worn out as thy heart is, Jesus is willing to take it. The eleventh hour is come, yet Christ is willing to engage thee. He deserved the first and best of thy days, yet he is willing to accept the last and the worst of them, rather than that thou shouldest perish. O let him now see your hearts at his feet in humble submission and holy desire; and let him this day have it to say, "They are at last conquered; they are coming to me at last, and I will in nowise cast them out."

DISCOURSE VI.

THE NEARNESS OF SALVATION A MOTIVE TO VIGILANCE.

ROMANS xiii. 11. *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*

IT is a charge which has been sometimes brought against religion, that it cherishes an indolent spirit; and that the assurance of salvation which it gives tends to make men careless about further attainments in excellence. Its votaries are represented as saying, "Let the slaves of the world eat the bread of carefulness, and amass its wealth by incessant toil; and let men of a legal temper strive to be rich in good works; we will sleep on, and take our rest, for we are sure of heaven." They are charged with imagining that nothing can endanger their salvation, and that therefore caution and fear are in them both needless and degrading. Cavillers who bring forth such charges show their utter ignorance of those noble and generous principles of religion which would make a saint avoid sin, even though he knew it would do him no detriment, and practise holiness, though to it no rewards were promised.

Accusations of this nature are easily repelled by exhibiting the spirit of the Gospel, which is a spirit of active goodness, by a reference to many of its pre-

cepts, and by detailing the strenuous efforts of its genuine disciples to go on to perfection. The Apostle Paul, who had the certain assurance of his own safety, and that of his companions in his voyage, said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved;"* and he who so solemnly states, that grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Saviour, hath as expressly declared, "that without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

The words of our text hold out the certainty and the nearness of salvation, as calling for the utmost vigilance and activity. Instead of indulging in the slumbers of indolence, or in the idle musings of a vain imagination, Christians are to watch and to be sober; to press into the kingdom of God; and to fear lest, after a promise has been left them of entering into his rest, any of them should seem to come short of it. They must strive to reach heaven, in the use of all appointed means; and they must depend on the righteousness of the Saviour alone, and place no reliance on their own exertions in holiness.

In the following discourse I shall explain the view which is here given of the saints' privilege, and of their present duty; and then show how the nearness of their salvation should stir them up to the most vigilant activity in it.

I. Let us attend to the view here given of the pri-

* Acts xxvii. 31.

vilege of good men—"Now is their salvation nearer than when they believed."

1. This expression intimates, that, in the day of believing, the soul's connexion with salvation commences. It is at that happy season that a man is brought from a state of condemnation into a state of acceptance, and that a principle of holiness is implanted in the soul. Then the man begins that course which terminates in everlasting life. Angels hail him an heir of salvation, and rejoice in that change which shall issue in his complete meetness for their society and exercises, and for the inheritance of the saints in light. Then the language of the apostle to the believing Hebrews becomes applicable to Him, "Ye are come to Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."*

Some have viewed conversion as the period from which men might date their sorrows and struggles, but it is then that salvation commences, which brightens life as it advances, and which hath new comforts for every successive scene. Then the words of our Lord to Zaccheus are applicable to the happy individual—"This day is salvation come to thy house." Salvation, not indeed completed, but salvation begun,

* Heb. xii. 22—24.

and carrying with it every pledge of consummation which the merits of the Redeemer, the grace of the Spirit, and the fidelity of both, can yield.

The distance between faith and complete salvation has been in some instances short. Quickly has the perfection of glory followed the formation of grace, but in other cases there are many years betwixt them. It belongs to Him to regulate this who is the Author and the Finisher of faith, and in his hand our times are; and those to whom the longest trial of faith is appointed have no reason to complain, because thus it shall be found to higher praise and to a brighter glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

The connexion betwixt faith and salvation cannot be broken. Good men may have their fears and misgivings as to its stability in their own particular case; but these are permitted to operate, to excite them to greater circumspection, and to maintain that humility and dependence which are their best ornament and true security.

2. It is intimated, that at death the believer's salvation is completed. The Apostle represents the believer as not saved till death, because then the blessings of it already bestowed are enjoyed without mixture, and those which were reserved for the land of uprightness are fully imparted. We do not say that a man is saved when the burning heat of his fever is allayed, and the fury of the pulse is calmed, but when health hath sent back its freshness to the countenance and its vigour to the limbs. We say not that the victory is gained when the troops of the enemy are thrown into disorder, or when, in one or two

parts of the field, they turn their backs and flee, but when not a soldier pertaining to them remains alive in the scene, and when the work of blood gives place to the burying of the dead and dividing the spoil. It is at death that the justification of life is announced to us from the throne, that the adopted child is brought to his Father's house, that Satan is bruised under the feet of God's saints, and that they are presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. It is then that the Divine image is perfected in all its lineaments and in all its destined beauty, and that not a trace is left of the characters of the old man by which the features of the new creature were so sadly marred. It is then that love is purified from every earthly tendency, and devotion from every languid feeling and wandering thought. It is then that union to Christ is followed by being ever with the Lord, and the struggles of religion by the shout of victory. It is here that religion gives its sword and helmet, there its joy and its crown, and then a delight is felt which no uneasiness mars, and no disaster disturbs, but which is ever pure, and sweet, and full.

3. That Christians advanced in life are warranted to conclude that their salvation is very near. It often happens that men fail in attaining worldly objects which they have long pursued, when they seem almost within their grasp. Our acquaintance with human life will bring to our recollection many melancholy instances of the truth of this remark. Many a man, who has laboured hard to attain such a competence in the world as would enable him to maintain

in comfortable circumstances the object of his affection, has seen her removed to the darkness of the grave almost at the period of anticipated union. Such mournful events are monitors to the young of that sobriety which they ought to maintain in their purest earthly attachments, and of that dependence on God which in their keenest exertions they ought to feel. We often hear also of men who have laboured long to attain some situation of wealth or honour, who have seen their hopes perish by the death or caprice of a patron, and at a period when it was too late to seek such advancement in any other quarter. But he who seeks the salvation of God in the grace of the Gospel shall attain it; for the presence of Christ is pledged to direct, bless, and succeed his labours. He is with him in whom he hath righteousness and strength; and, separated as he may feel himself from others, he can say, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."*

Every Sabbath, every sacrament, and every year that comes round, the good man may say, "I am now nearer to the Sabbath which remains for the people of God, to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to eternity." This is a reflection which can make him think without a sigh on the termination of the happiest seasons. You are sometimes apt to complain how swiftly the time spent in the scene of joy passes away; how quick was its pace when you enjoyed the so-

* Psalm lxxiii. 23, 24.

ciety of those you loved, and when God commanded his lovingkindness to be with you in the daytime, and his song to be with you in the night; but while such is the feeling common to all human beings, as to the season of felicity, it is the peculiar lot of the good that these quickly passing days bring them nearer to the heavenly bliss. How happily is this consideration adapted to lighten the infirmities of old age! The daughters of music are brought low; but their very silence indicates that you are soon to sing the new song before the throne; in your failing strength you see mortality sinking into life, and amidst the uneasinesses which detach you from the society of the giddy and the light-hearted, you are preparing for a happier intercourse in a nobler scene. Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry; and while your soul cleaves to the dust, this is the call your Lord addresses to you: "Lift up your heads with joy, for your redemption draweth nigh."

II. Let us attend to the view which is here given of the duty required of them.

1. It intimates, that saints sometimes fall into a state of indolence and carelessness. Of the Romans, respecting whom Paul had given thanks that their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world, he here intimates that they were asleep. Of the ten virgins, by whom our Lord characterizes the professors of his religion, the sincere as well as the hypocritical, we are told that while the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. How cold and stupid are the hearts of saints in such circumstances when

they engage in prayer! There is neither eagerness of desire, nor melting of affection; how dull and languid are they in meditation!—the words which used to stir them up to wonder and ecstacy are contemplated without any emotion. Even at a communion-table, where the love of a suffering Redeemer made their hearts to burn, they find them carnal and careless.

In this situation, they are unconcerned about the interests of religion, and make no strenuous efforts to check the progress of error, or to reclaim the vicious from the evil of their ways. Inattentive to the voice of Heaven, they neither consider what God is calling to by mercies nor by afflictions. Like the dreams which are formed by the fancy in sleep, many idle conceits occupy their minds; and when they should reason like men, and hope like Christians, their foolish hearts are darkened. Contracted and chilled by selfishness, they enter not into the sorrows of the unhappy by a considerate sympathy.

These remarks are often applicable to aged Christians. Their feelings are blunted, their faculties decay, and they are ready to suppose that it is not from their weakness that exertion can be expected, and that, amidst their gloom and pains and fears, they require sympathy from others, but can exercise none.

The causes which give rise to this state are similar to those which produce natural sleep. Toil brings on weariness, and that disposes to slumber; and the Christian, amidst the labour and vexation of life, is ready to become weary and faint in his mind. The indulgence of the bodily appetites tends to bring on languor and heaviness, and nothing has a greater ten-

dency to deaden religious feeling, than mingling in the gratifications of the world. Intense heat and extreme cold have both this tendency. The man, on whom the scorching sun has been beating, seeks for the shadow of some rock or tree, where he may sit till exhausted nature is recreated by rest; and often have we heard of persons wandering in the snow till their strength was spent, and sitting down under the idea that they would rise in a little with fresh vigour to explore their way, but their senses soon became benumbed, and they sunk into the sleep of death. Thus doth prosperity enfeeble the energy of the mind, and often does adversity overwhelm it: they have fainted in the day of adversity who thought nothing could annoy them. There are certain soft sounds which lull to sleep, and there are suggestions of flatterers from without, and vanity and indolence from within; there are misrepresentations of the doctrines of the grace and merits of Christ which have the most unhappy influence in encouraging sloth and presumption; and there are strong delusions, by which the mind is infatuated and the heart is ensnared.

2. The text intimates, that Christians ought to rouse themselves up to vigilance and activity. The awakening which the Apostle speaks of is not partial and transient, like that which we sometimes see in a man asleep, who opens his eyes, looks about for a moment, mutters a few words, and then sinks into as deep a slumber as ever; but it is to the full and vigorous exercise of all his faculties in the work of the Lord; we must, from praying carelessly, supplicate with fervour and importunity; and, instead of languid

praise, stir up all that is within us to magnify and bless God's name. Meditation, casual and unsettled, must give place to eager and fixed contemplation; and with the feelings of a heart which regards Jesus Christ as all, we must follow hard after him.

In our families we must warn and teach every member of them with all wisdom and fidelity, that we may present them perfect in Christ Jesus. Instead of hurrying over your devotions as a task in which you feel no interest, and to which you attach no importance, it must be conducted in such a manner as to show that it is felt as the sweetest delight and the last duty of age. To the necessitous around us we must open our hand wide. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction may require much exertion, to watch by the side of those whose reason is bewildered, or whose spirit is broken, is a painful task, yet we must discharge these sad duties of charity with a willing mind. The inexperience of the young and the easiness of the simple we must correct by our counsels; and the audacity of the profane, and effrontery of the libertine, we must repress with the energy and the warmth of insulted virtue. The efforts made to promote the Redeemer's cause in the world we must second with our contributions, our counsels, and our prayers. In reading the history of the spread of the Gospel in the primitive times, and of the triumphs of the faith at the Reformation, we think that, had we lived then, we would have gloried to share in these labours of love; we could not have borne the thought of our names going down to posterity as lukewarm in such a cause. We would have gone with those of

whom the world was not worthy, to dens, and mountains, and prisons. But is not a sphere like theirs opening before us at present? It differs in this, that we have nought to dread but the sarcasms of infidel scorn, and the opposition of selfish formalists, who set their faces against every thing that savours of earnestness in religion, or that requires any sacrifice of worldly wealth. And what is all they can urge to discourage any zealous mind, and what is such hostility to the vengeance of tyrants and the cruelty of bloodthirsty men?

We must studiously cultivate sobriety of mind. The youngest will find this their best security against the fascinations of pleasure; and the aged must be deaf to the lessons of experience, if they are still charmed by a vain show, and if they still seek their happiness in the dreams of fancy.

3. It intimates, that the consideration of our present circumstances will show us the necessity of exciting ourselves to this vigilance and activity. There was something peculiar in the situation of the Romans, to which the Apostle may allude in the phrase, "and that knowing the time." They were now in a state of tranquillity; but he saw the tempest of persecution gathering over them, a tempest fierce and destructive; and he had pointed out to them those signs of the times in which they too might discover its approach. And was such a season fit for slumber? It was necessary for them to maintain the strictest vigilance. We have passed through a season in which the Lord came out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth. We have seen the distress of nations; we have heard the crash of thrones; we

have witnessed sad vicissitudes in the condition of families; amidst the plots and preparations of the violent and the ambitious we felt the jeopardy of our country; and amidst the vehemence of infidel blasphemy our hearts trembled for the ark of God. The Lord has sent us days of happier aspect; but we may well suppose that the clouds will return after the rain; and it becomes us, amidst our present advantages, not to be high-minded, but to fear.

It was peculiarly unsuitable in the Romans to slumber, since the Gospel of salvation had so lately arisen on them with healing in its wings. Indolence and security would be much more criminal now than in their former darkness; and when did knowledge abound in this land as it does now? Religious light fills not only our temples; but prisons, hospitals, and cottages, are brightened by its influence, and schools swarming with little children, crying Hosanna to the Son of David, are to be seen in every corner of the land. Religious information is circulated among every class of the community in modes which render it not only accessible but agreeable to all; and thus amply furnished with the knowledge of God's will, if we do it not, we deserve to be beaten with many stripes. Let us walk in the light while we have it. Let it be considered too, that the present is a time marked by the peculiar activity of some in the cause of Christ. I refer to those who have gone forth to spread the knowledge of salvation in heathen countries, and who are labouring in the work of the Gospel amidst great privations; some of them, too, in inhospitable climates, and others amidst perils from the craft and violence of savage tribes; and shall you be

negligent whose duties are comparatively so easy, and in scenes where you have so many facilities for holy labour? Can you slumber while they thus hold forth the word of life? How noble was the spirit of Uriah, and how worthy of imitation, who said, when urged to go to repose in his dwelling, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into mine house? and this resolution not to go, no plan of deceit could induce him to violate. I may add, that many of these saints were far advanced in years; they were well aware, from the ordinary limits of life, they should soon be laid in the house of silence; and was it fit that such should sleep? To the old disciples in our churches this remark is peculiarly applicable. You will have a long time of rest and inactivity in the grave, and why indulge in it now? Every symptom of decay, which warns you that you must soon die, calls on you to redeem the time. Your eye is now dim, but it shall soon be completely closed; your voice is now feeble, but it will soon be utterly silent; you are ready to regret that you can see so little of the spreading glory of the Saviour over the world; but were you more zealous you might behold more. It is delightful to hear of so many institutions among the young for pious charity; and why should not the aged copy an example which they ought to have set? David died in advanced life, yet we know from the seventy-second Psalm what were the last wishes of his heart, his last injunctions to his son, and his last prayers to his

God. Never was there zeal more ardent and more rapturous than the zeal which glowed in that failing heart.

III. Let us now consider how you should be excited to this vigilance and activity by the nearness of your salvation.

1. Here the appeal may be made to your gratitude. The man who has conferred important favours on us, and who, we know, intends to do still more for our happiness, we are eager to please. We would consider the disregard of the counsels and injunctions of such a man as a baseness of the blackest cast; and to strain every nerve to serve and to gratify him we should feel both our duty and our pleasure. Now, think what God hath done and what he still intends to do for you. He has brought you into a state of salvation; he is preparing a place for you in heaven; he is longing for the period when you shall be fitted to possess it, and is making you ready for the eternal inheritance. Now, shall you be careless about the honour of such a Benefactor, or negligent in the service of such a Master? Shall you indulge the sloth which is so hateful in his sight, or listen more to the soothing voice of flattery than to the animating calls of duty? Shall we slumber in the path which he smooths for our progress, and, amidst such gratifying discoveries of life and immortality, shall we mind earthly things? Shall unremitted kindnesses be requited by carelessness in his service, and by homage paid him after long intervals of devotedness to earthly things? Heaven is the scene of perpetual gratitude; and most inconsistent with the character of such a state is con-

duct so marked with ingratitude in those who profess that they are not far from the kingdom of God. It is most probable that conscience may suggest such fears as this to trouble your last days, that God will not bestow the blessings of glory on those who have made him so poor a requital for the blessings of grace.

2. Consider how unsuitable sloth is to the prospects before you. He who has the prospect of being soon raised to some office of distinction, and which requires a variety of qualifications for the proper discharge of its duties, labours most assiduously to acquire these. We seek not for such a man in the scenes of thoughtless gaiety, but in the schools of wisdom and eloquence. The nearer the period of his installation arrives, the more anxious and eager is he. He seizes and improves every moment. And is your salvation near, and shall not you give all diligence to be found of your Lord in peace? You are soon to associate with those who serve God day and night in his temple; and shall you now slumber? You are soon to sing the song of the Lamb; and shall you now hang your harps on the willows? You are soon to see God as he is; and shall you now forget him? You are soon to be perfect in holiness; and shall you now be the slaves of iniquity? The bridegroom is at hand; and shall your lamps go out? Loud is the call that is addressed to you, "Prepare to meet thy God!" and shall you say, "My Lord delayeth his coming?" Glory at hand requires the full and lively exercise of grace; and heaven opening before you demands the utmost ardour of love and praise. Beautiful was the correspondence betwixt the exercise and the situation

of Stephen, as exhibited in the narrative of his death, "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into Heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."*

3. Consider how injurious to others your carelessness and sloth may be. The command of God, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," must give the greatest force to this argument. If you, whose age and attainments show that your salvation is so near, slumber, it must damp the ardour of the young disciple. When he looks at you, he will think that he should not be urged to all this haste and toil, when those who know more of religion than he does can take time for indulgence, and that he may follow the example while he is at that period of existence when it is tasted with double relish. Consider how you will feel when his indolence is charged on you, and when you are accused with having chilled the ardour of those whom you should have stimulated in the way of righteousness.

It is a great mistake to imagine, that it is only positive acts of wickedness which have a pernicious influence in point of example; for much more extensive and fatal is that of sloth and presumption. Against great crimes the horror of the mind is raised; but an easy indolent life presents nothing to intimidate amidst its allurements. Besides, it may have the most injurious effects on those who are halting betwixt God and the world. In vain shall we urge them to hasten their escape from the wrath of God, or tell them to improve opportunities which death will soon

* Acts vii. 55.

close for ever. They will point to you reclining at your ease, and say that salvation may be attained on far easier terms. They may praise you as men of good sense and moderation, but you have little reason to value their commendations; for the conviction of their mind is, that if you felt the power of religion you would not be thus careless, and that the enthusiast whom you ridicule is a more upright character than you.

Your coldness and sluggishness in religion, after your former zeal, will give plausibility to the conclusions of those who deny the perseverance of the saints. Your conduct will be referred to in all their cavils and declamations; and the feeble and the timid will be discouraged by objections so specious, and by appearances so unfavourable to that idea and hope of progressive excellence which they delighted to cherish as the most pleasing of all their prospects.

4. Consider how detrimental indolence will be to your own interest and happiness. If you slumber with salvation so near, you will provoke God to awaken you by a shock dreadful and trying. The heart, now enticed by vanity, shall be wrung with thoughts of anguish, and desires and tendencies will be formed in your hearts which it will require the most painful efforts to counteract.

Think on the gloom this will spread over your death-bed, when the reflection will be pressed on you, that your life is a blank as to all that is good and useful. Consider with what horror the eye just opened from such unhallowed slumber will behold the Great Judge when he comes, and his reward with him, to render to every man according to his work.

No calls are more frequent and urgent than to prepare for it, and how bitter the consciousness that these have been disregarded! "Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."*

I do not say that God will suffer his people to sink into such negligence as will bring on their exclusion from the mansions of bliss, but this I will say, that the highest honour and felicity there shall be allotted only to those who were fervent in spirit serving the Lord. Those who had received ten, five, and two talents, and who carefully improved these, our Lord tells us in the parable receive a suitable reward; but the man who hid his in the earth was branded with the name of wicked and slothful servant, and cast into outer darkness. If there could be shame and sorrow in heaven, it would be felt by those who are conscious that, when their opportunities of promoting the interests of Christ were on the point of closing, they were sunk in sloth. We are ready to suppose that it will be impossible for such persons to see ungodly connexions led away from judgment with the workers of iniquity, without this bitter reflection, that they had not been so faithful in their warnings and so earnest in their counsels as they ought to have been. And the degrees of glory in heaven will be a perpetual memento of superior vigilance, and of the defective activity of those who, with equal or better op-

* Mark xiii. 35—37.

portunities and talents, were often forgetful and idle.

There is another view which may be taken of this argument which may add to its influence. As the ship which is within a few hours' sail of the haven has sometimes been driven out to sea to struggle for weeks with winds and waves, till the crew are exhausted with hunger, fear, and toil, so has the indolence of saints been punished by a prolonged stay in this scene of trouble, instead of having an entrance ministered to them abundantly into the kingdom of the Saviour. To a carnal man length of days in any state seems desirable; but to a good man it appears far otherwise, when it is imbittered by the displeasure of his God, and is passed amidst painful regrets and forebodings. So true it is, that we can omit no duty without the loss of what is valuable and pleasing, and that we can break no precept of the divine law without injury to ourselves and to others. Rise up then, ye who are at ease, and abound always in the work of the Lord: for ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

CONCLUSION.

1. How happy are they who have obtained precious faith through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ! This principle is the impulse to all that is holy and beneficent in human conduct, and its assurances and prospects can encourage the heart in scenes where every feeling seems precluded but those of terror and despair.

Many of those saints could tell the time when they

were brought to believe. To them the word of salvation preached by the Apostles had been before unknown; but it had come to them, not in word only, but in the Holy Ghost, and in power and in much assurance. Formerly they had gloried in the days sacred to superstition or to the triumphs of Rome; now they rejoiced in the season of grace, the years of the right hand of the Most High. Happy they who, by the remarkable circumstances of their conversion, can ascertain the period when they were born again, and who are conscious in the change which has been effected in them, that they have felt the power of renovating grace!

It would be foolish to suppose, that, in countries such as ours, conversions will all be thus striking; for those who knew the Gospel from their childhood, and those who, under the sweet nurture of holy parents, and the benignant influence of domestic religion, were gently drawn to wisdom and piety, may not be able to specify the time when the saving change was actually wrought, yet their conduct proves that they have experienced it. The purity which shrinks from the least stain of sin, a habitual delight in the worship of God, and the uniform kindness of a generous and tender heart, as fully evince the influence of the Spirit of God as the most remarkable reformation.

2. Let saints be exhorted to use every means of excitement to this holy activity. Pray without ceasing that God may quicken you according to his word. Often meditate on the injunctions to activity in the Bible,* "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment

* Isaiah lvi. 1.

and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." Reflect on the various examples of increasing activity which are set before you. Consider him especially who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Think how he spent the three years which preceded his crucifixion; how his time was filled up with sermons, miracles, labours, sufferings, prayers, and kindnesses! and how he employed the forty days which intervened betwixt his resurrection and his ascension; on the visits of love, the counsels of wisdom, and the incitements to diligence with which they were occupied! Remember the diligence of Paul, and how, in the most difficult circumstances, he was active to the last. The tree on which the Saviour found nought but leaves, and which his curse dried up from the roots, is an emblem of too many in the visible church; but there are others to whom we can point who are flourishing in the courts of our God, and who are still bearing fruit in old age, to show that the Lord is upright.

The remembrance of the time you have already spent in indolence will stimulate you. Think of the years of the basest sloth you spent in a state of nature, and on the hours and days you have slumbered since you first turned to righteousness, and you will say,—"Has folly had our years, and shall we deny to wisdom our moments?" Has the world had the best of our time, and shall we deny to Heaven and eternity the decline of our days? God of our life and salvation, sacred to thee shall be our future time. It is infinite condescension in thee to accept of it; and it is

our reasonable service to yield it though its moments were ages." The more deeply we are affected with our past sloth the less likely are we to fall into it again; and while many in their penitential lamentations notice only the evils they have done, it is one of the characters of the good that they bewail their sins of omission,—the services they ought to have performed, but did not.

Let Christians, too, labour to maintain the vigilance and activity of each other. If persons are travelling together in the snow, and one of them becomes feeble and languid, and insists on lying down to sleep, his companions, aware how fatal this may be, try to keep him awake and moving by every possible method. They will promise to do every thing that they can to assist him; they will describe to him the welcome and the rest of home, and if these softer methods will not do, they must shake and drag him along. These rough methods must be used or their companion will perish. And let Christians strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. Let them exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest their hearts be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin: "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head."*

3. Let the consideration of the nearness of salvation reconcile you to affliction and to death. You are in a little to inherit the kingdom, and shall you complain of present wants and losses? The spirits of the just are waiting to receive you to their happy society, and

* Psalm cxli. 5.

can you complain of the solitude which death hath brought into your dwelling? Fret not that there is so little in this world to gratify you, when on you the Spirit of glory rests so abundantly; and though the voice of sorrow is sometimes heard in the house of your pilgrimage, the mansion of rest is opening its gates for you, and calling you to the melodies of eternal peace. At every sigh and tear you may say, I have another tear less to shed, another sigh less to heave; and your light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for you a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.

But you have reason not only to be reconciled to death, but to long for it. Whatever view you take of death, you may connect salvation with it. Its agonies prepare you for the joys of salvation, and its separations are followed by intercourse with the Saviour. That cold hand brings with it the call to heaven, and that vile body shall be fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. "I looked, and behold a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death, and hell followed with him."* Such is death to the wicked; but it comes to the good in a mode very different: and though to the eye of sense it is followed by the coffin and the grave, and corruption and dust, yet faith beholds it followed by the possession of heaven, by the reign of life, by the service of the celestial temple, and by the enjoyments of the paradise of God. Death is gain to the pious; and the more of Christ that there is in the life, the more of advantage will there be in dissolution.

* Rev. vi. 8.

4. Let the young be exhorted to activity in goodness and piety. Let not the glow of youth be chilled by sluggishness, and let not vigour, which might do so much for the best of masters, be wasted in folly. Labour much in the Lord, for even your time may be short. It is not the withering flower only that is swept away by the blast, but the leaves of many a plant are strewed on the ground in its gayest beauty and in its sweetest fragrance. How happy is he whose days have been few, but whose labours have been more abundant, and who, without a season of infirmity and languor, goes from active service to God on earth to unceasing worship in heaven! Let no man have reason to despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, charity, spirit, faith, and purity.

The following are the urgent admonitions addressed to Timothy in youth, by one who loved him as a father doth a son, and I trust you will regard them as addressed to you, and comply with them as he did: —"Stir up the gift of God that is in thee, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, make full proof of thy ministry."*

Finally, how solemn are the lessons suggested by this subject to unconverted men! Salvation is far from the wicked; and what is most horrible, ye have put it from you, and judged everlasting life unworthy of your acceptance. No character suits your state and condition so well as this, "O daughter of Babylon, near to destruction;" as the Lord liveth, there is

* 2 Tim. iv. 5.

but a step betwixt you and death, betwixt you and hell, and can you sleep within the sound of its wailings, or sport while your feet are sliding down to it? What awful reflections are these,—I am another stage on my journey to destruction, and another day nearer hell! Amidst all the sorrows and struggles of the good, they can comfort themselves with the thought, that though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning; but, after millions of ages have passed over you in torment, the termination of your misery shall be no nearer than when you were first plunged into it, because it is eternal. What meanest thou then, O sleeper; arise, and call upon thy God, if so be thy God will think on thee, that thou perish not. You have rejected his salvation with contempt, yet still doth he say, "Hearken to me, ye stout-hearted, and far from righteousness: behold I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry."* It is brought near for your acceptance and happiness, if ye will receive it, and for your more aggravated condemnation if ye reject it. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; death and judgment, heaven and hell, are all near. Awake, therefore, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light.

If you will perish, we wish to have this testimony in your consciences, that we did what we could to prevent your destruction, but would to God we could persuade and urge your lingering hearts to flee to the Gospel refuge. If the sense of immediate danger,

* Isaiah xlvi. 12, 13.

and of all-sufficient help in Christ, is making you say
ith Lot, "Behold the city is near to flee unto; let
escap thither, and my soul shall live." Then God
ith, "l ee, I have accepted thee concerning this
te thee, escape thither."*

* Gen. xix. 20—22.

DISCOURSE VII.

THE CONVERSION OF AN AGED TRANSGRESSOR.

2 CHRONICLES xxxiii. 12, 13. *And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*

PROFANE history is filled with the acts of kings. The memorable events of their reign which it details have been too often the display of vain pomp, or of bloody ambition; and too often has truth been sacrificed to palliate the excesses of monarchs, and to give a favourable view of the condition of their subjects. But sacred history, in the notices which it gives of kings, dwells chiefly on the moral qualities of their heart and character, and describes them with perfect impartiality. How insignificant in the estimation of superior beings are the wit or valour which the world admires when compared with these! They lead to happiness or misery for ever, while the accomplishments which the world applauds pass away like the rest of its fashions.

The book of sacred history from which our text is taken gives us a melancholy view of kings; for of the great number whose course it details, few had

any claim to rule in their people's hearts. The account of the reign and of the conversion of Manasseh in this chapter is deeply interesting. After a long reign, disgraced by every excess of impiety, profligacy, and cruelty, he is turned to righteousness. Many a prayer, we may believe, was put up for him, by his godly father, yet these are not answered till he is far advanced in years, and till he seemed to have reached the utmost limits of crime. Let those who are fainting in their minds, because their prayers for the conversion of their children have not been answered, look to the incident before us, and let them learn to pray always, and not to faint. You must not, even in the most painful discoveries of their depravity, despair of their conversion, but regard these as motives to greater earnestness in your efforts to bring them to repentance; and you have this consolation amidst hope deferred, that the zeal of parental piety is well pleasing to God, and that, should such prayers be unavailing as to children, they shall not be lost on yourselves.

In the history of Manasseh, in the book of Kings, no notice is taken of his conversion, and had it not been for the mention of it in this book of Chronicles, it would have been supposed that he died as he lived, in his sins. This ought to teach us to beware of forming positive judgments of the final state of the greatest transgressors. Changes unknown to us may have taken place in their views, feelings, and conduct, and some who have been thought to have perished in their iniquity are in heaven, magnifying the power and grace of Him who is mighty to save.

In the following discourse, I shall call your attention to the circumstances which, by the divine blessing, led to the conversion of Manasseh, to the effect which the grace of God produced on him, and to some considerations which rendered this change peculiarly striking.

I. Let us attend to the circumstances which, by the grace of God, led to the conversion of Manasseh. It appears from the narrative that these were the two following:

1. *Affliction.*—Any great calamity which befalls the prosperous has a tendency to check the pride of the human heart, to convince us of our frailty and dependence, to impress us with the insufficiency of this world's goods to our happiness, and to strike us with the consciousness of our guilt before God. There are cases in which this tendency is counteracted by the impatience which frets against the Lord, and the stubbornness which will not bend before him; but when he chastens in mercy, the discipline of affliction softens and humbles, and the greater the change is which it makes in our condition, the more potent is its salutary influence. Such were its effects on Manasseh.

There is no calamity which falls upon kings which they feel so painfully as the discomfiture of their armies and the subversion of their power. How terrible is the transition from a palace to a dungeon, and when the hands which held a sceptre are bound with fetters! Such was the case with Manasseh. Defeated in battle by the armies of the king of As-

syria, he escaped for his life, and was found by his pursuers in a thicket, in which he attempted to conceal himself. Providence, which had designs of mercy towards him, permitted them not to slay him, but they bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. In this sad reverse he must have been struck with the folly of that presumption which made him defy the power of Heaven, and with the justice of that doom which had driven him from a throne which he had disgraced, and from a land which he had defiled with blood. Some in his situation would have vented their rage in cursing the treachery of the courtiers who had deserted them, the cowardice of the troops which had fainted in the day of battle, and the disloyalty of their subjects, who had not made a firmer stand for their monarch and for their independence; but he was led to more salutary reflections. His excesses had now no flatterers to palliate them, and no scenes of splendour or sensual enjoyment presented themselves before him to withdraw his mind from his guilty deeds. They appeared before him in the challenges of an evil conscience.

The beneficial effects of affliction on the heart and conduct have been presented to us in men of all ranks and ages. The disease which hath stopped the gay career of youthful dissipation hath impressed the thoughtless young man with the folly of his conduct, and sent him to his grave detached in affection from earthly things, or restored him to society sober-minded and steady. The misfortune which has taken from the old man the money, or property, to which he looked for his comfortable support in all the years

of his frailty, hath weaned him from that love of the world, which is the last passion of age, and turned his heart to treasures which thieves cannot steal, nor folly waste, and of which treachery cannot defraud him.

2. *Solitary Reflection.*—Some in calamity stupify their minds by intemperance. They are glad to escape, by degrading excesses, from reflections which they are unwilling to endure. It often happens too, that the partners of the wicked in misfortune employ every method of gaiety, or sarcasm, or false reasoning, or vain hope, to prevent them from those meditations and purposes which might lead to repentance. Many an unfortunate debtor hath in a prison found, not monitors to teach him more sobriety and prudence in future, but tempters to the excess by which solicitude is banished, and to the knavery by which fortune is retrieved at the expense of justice and honour. And many a youthful criminal hath, by being mingled with the most audacious of evil-doers, lost every feeling of compunction and shame, and come forth prepared for every desperate enterprise. It is of immense importance that criminals especially should be left to their own reflections, and that nothing should be permitted to divert their minds from the salutary lessons of fear and remorse.

What a variety of objects would press on the view of Manasseh in his lonely musings! His father died when he was a boy; it was at twelve years of age that he began to reign, yet he could not but recollect the lessons and prayers of that holy man, the efforts he had made to teach him to fear the Lord in his

youth, and the dishonour he had done to his counsels and memory by his long course of wickedness. He recollected how he had insulted the memory of that father by building again the high places which Hezekiah had broken down, that he had set up an idol in the temple in which God had chosen to put his name for ever, and that, instead of devoting his offspring to the Father of Mercies as his parent had done, he had made them pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. He could not but call to mind the contempt he had cast on the oracles of God, by seeking counsel from evil spirits; and how heavy on his conscience must the murders which he had committed have been, who shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another!

It is the unhappy lot of the great, that the bustle in which they live unfits them for sober reflection, and that there are so many eager to repel, by statements accordant to the dictates of self-love, the charges of an accusing conscience. Blessed is the misfortune which separates them from such flatterers, and which leaves them in a gloom where there is no glare to dazzle, and in a silence where conscience hath nought to interrupt, to repress, or to soften its remonstrances.

These painful reflections did not drive him to desperation or suicide, but to prayer. They operated on him as the musings of the prodigal son did, who, when he had wasted his substance with riotous living, and under the pressure of want would fain have filled his belly with the husks on which the swine he

was feeding did eat, came to himself, and said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."*

3. *Prayer.*—Some in the day of calamity abandon themselves to despair; others employ themselves in soliciting the compassion and the help of their fellow-creatures; and of those who pray to God in this situation many ask only relief from the adversity under which they labour, while they never once implore the removal of that guilt on account of which they have been afflicted. But how different was the conduct of Manasseh! His situation was indeed dismal, and many in such a case would have said, "There is no hope;" but he did not view himself as beyond the reach of Jehovah's power and mercy. In the land of exile and in the lowest pit his hand could reach him. He did not occupy himself in supplicating the favour of his keepers, of the courtiers, or of the monarch whose captive he was; neither did he attempt any correspondence with his subjects, that he might stir them up to endeavour to release or to avenge him; but he looked to the Lord his God. And it was not deliverance from prison, or restoration to his palace and to his throne, that he sought merely, but the pardon of that guilt which he now saw to be so aggra-

* Luke xv. 17—19.

vated, the purification of his heart, which he now felt to be desperately wicked, and salvation from that misery in hell of which his present dungeon and fetters were only an emblem. Mention is made in this narrative again and again of his prayer; and this circumstance, added to the gracious answer which it received, shows us that it was dictated by the Spirit of supplication. It is the only prayer in his life which is noticed in the sacred records, not to intimate that he lived after this a stranger to prayer, but because this was his first prayer from the heart, the prayer that led him first to God, the prayer which terminated his connexion with idols, and left him without a thought or a wish that pointed to them; the prayer which was the commencement of a life of devotion. The prayer of Jonah in the belly of hell is recorded, and the cry of the awakened jailer in the prison at Philippi also; but this one hath not been transmitted to us. Every awakened sinner may form some idea of what it was by his own confessions and supplications, when first roused to contrition.

It is a beautiful circumstance which is recorded about this prayer, that he besought the Lord his God; he recollected that to God his father had devoted him, and he thought with unutterable wonder that the God whom he had so foully dishonoured permitted him to call him so. The idols to whom he had looked in the [illegible]perity he now saw to be utterly vain [illegible] but he felt that in the Lord Jehovah [illegible]ting strength and mercy. The call [illegible]red by the prophet Hosea in the [illegible], was happily adapted, if brought to

his mind, to direct and encourage his exercise: "O, Israel, return to the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say to him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips."*

How aptly may this exercise of Manasseh's be illustrated by that of Paul when he was led blind to Damascus, and was for three days in such mental horror and agony, that he did neither eat nor drink; and when the God who gave him relief mentioned to Ananias this character of the mourner whom he sent him to comfort; "Go and inquire for Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth."† The description in the 33d chapter of the book of Job was happily verified in the exercise and in the privileges of these two mourners, and, I may add, of many others. "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with great pain: So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness; then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth:

* Hosea, xiv. 1, 2. † Acts ix. 11.

He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him; and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.

II. I now proceed to show how the grace of God operated in Manasseh.

1. He humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. Every word in this sentence claims our attention; he humbled himself. Providence had humbled him. It had cast him from a throne into the dust; yet many have been humbled in lot, who were not humbled in spirit; but Manasseh had got such a sight of his vileness, that he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and in ashes. Once he entertained very lofty conceits of himself, and these were cherished by the flatterers who surround the great and the wealthy; but now he regarded himself as the vilest of the vile, and, prostrate on the floor of his dungeon, acknowledged that he had sinned against the Lord exceedingly, that he deserved to be cast into the lowest hell, and that God had chastened him less than his iniquities deserved. The tears that gushed from his eyes flowed not for his fallen greatness, but for his aggravated wickedness; and severe as the

taunts were with which his enemies reproached him, they were light when compared with the reproaches of his own conscience. Under this mental agony divine mercy supports, though unseen.

How different were his feelings from those of king Saul in the day of his calamity! The last feelings which influenced his heart were those of pride and despair; the only solicitude he felt was to escape the indignity of being slain by the Philistines; and to avoid this he took a sword and fell upon it. He did not turn to him that had laid him low; his only aim was to be delivered from the shame of being the captive and the victim of his foes; but the spirit of Manasseh was meek and lowly, broken and contrite, and he loathed himself in his own sight for his iniquities and for his abominations. But it is said that he humbled himself greatly. This term points out the degree and the permanence of this humiliation. He felt that for such a sinner as he had been no abasement could be too low, and that no epithet of blame was too severe which could be applied to his conduct. Amidst the degradation to which he was reduced, he was conscious that this sad pre-eminence still remained to him, that he was the worst of sinners. And this humiliation was not transient. By night and by day he mourned and wept. How greatly did David humble himself when he besought God for his sick child, and when he fasted and lay all night on the earth, and the elders of his house arose and went to him to raise him up from the earth; but he would not, neither would he eat

bread with them! We read of no comforter that attempted to stay the sorrows of Manasseh; but though they had, he would have continued to afflict his soul.

It is an affecting expression, that he humbled himself before the God of his fathers. The consideration, that the God whom he had offended was the God of his fathers, tended both to excite and to sooth his sorrow. That he should have dishonoured the God by whom his father had been so blessed, and to whose service he had so solemnly devoted him, appeared to him criminality of the most atrocious kind. The words of the prophet to the degenerate son of a godly father were most applicable to him, "Did not thy father do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it."* Yet, remembering the grace of God to his fathers, he was led to hope that it would not be denied to him when he sought it as an earnest suppliant at the footstool of mercy. How delightful to his father would this humiliation be! Infinitely more pleasing than the most splendid worldly success; and with what rapture would he join in the joy excited by it among the angels of God!

It is a very interesting circumstance, that, amidst this humiliation, he prayed without ceasing. It is a

* Jer. xxii. 15—17.

false humility which leads some to say, "I am such a great sinner, I dare not pray." This is not the abasement of contrition, but of pride. We cannot think too meanly of ourselves before God; but we must ever remember, that it is not our merit that entitles us to pray, nor our unworthiness that should keep us back; that, by the blood of Christ, the guiltiest of the human race may draw nigh with boldness, and that the more the penitent hath to say against himself he hath the more to supplicate from Divine mercy.

2. He was made to know that the Lord was God. This great truth had been taught him by his father in early life. Like his illustrious predecessor, Hezekiah would often address him thus:—"Thou Manasseh, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind;" but these counsels had been long forgotten, and he and his people had been wholly given to idolatry. Now, though far from the means of religious knowledge, God shone into his heart, to give him the light of the knowledge of his glory as it shines in the face of Jesus. The pious lessons of his youth were restored and extended, and he saw what he had sought in vain in all the ceremonies and rites of idolatry, an atonement for his sins in the Lamb of God, and the Holy One of Israel pacified to him, notwithstanding all that he had done. This blessed light irradiated his prison, opened his understanding, and sanctified his heart.

In the gracious tokens with which he was favoured

of God's acceptance of his prayer, he knew that the Lord was God. He remembered his own implacable and vindictive spirit; and when he thought of the mercy of God to one that had showed no mercy, he felt that God's thoughts were not as his thoughts, nor Jehovah's ways as his ways. The hope which lifted his eye he felt that God only could inspire, and the comfort which brightened his dungeon he alone could impart.

His restoring him to his country and throne was a token of reconciliation and pardon. He inclined the king of Assyria to liberate him, and to show favour to him; and this he ascribed, not to his caprice, or to the influence of his own solicitations, but to Him in whose hand are the hearts of kings. It was from the lips of Jehovah that he heard the voice proceeding which said to him, "Go forth;" and it was his hand that led him to the home from which it had driven him in mercy. The expression may intimate also his acknowledgment of the sole divinity of Jehovah. This glorious truth he had wickedly denied; he had said to the works of his hands, "Ye are my gods," and had done all that was in his power to blot out God's name and worship from the only scene where he had revealed himself in his word to man. Now, he was eager to confess his former folly and impiety, and, though surrounded by idolaters, to stir up all that was within him to magnify and bless his name. He would, under an afflicting sense of the years he had lost in folly and impiety, and which he could not now recall, devote every effort in his power

udy of the oracles of God and of the rites of

his worship. To him the Bible would now be a companion and a counsellor; the temple the scene of his rest and consolation; and his main solicitude was not to form alliances for the security of his last years, but to cultivate fellowship with the God of salvation, to whom belong the issues from prison, and sorrow, and death.

3. Let us attend to the fruits which he brought forth meet for repentance. It is no easy task to induce men of power to change their measures; and some who, under the impulse of strong feeling, have employed their influence in reforming abuses around them, have, in a short while, become quite lukewarm, and given their countenance to evils which they once seemed resolved to put away. This was not the case with Manasseh. The reformation he laboured to bring about was general, and he persevered in his efforts in spite of all opposition. Idolatry and superstition have been found by tyrants the support of their despotic authority; and it is not from a people sunk in ignorance and brutality that they imagine they have any opposition to fear. Intelligence and piety diffuse a spirit of freedom, and have therefore been frowned on by those who are jealous of their prerogatives; but Manasseh sweeps away the rubbish of all that folly and prejudice had held sacred: "He took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon

peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel."

He did not listen to the suggestions of indolence as the aged often do, nor say, Had I been in the vigour of life I would have exerted myself strenuously in the work of public reformation, and set my face like a flint against all opposition; but what can I do with faculties blunted by age, and a mind enfeebled by struggling with adversity? I will commit the work to others, and will weep in secret places for my faults. Instead of this he acted with a zeal which spared no corruption and shrunk from no effort. He had been the corrupter of his people, and to turn them to piety and righteousness was now the grand object of his reign.

Thus it is that the sincerity of repentance is seen in the penitent's opposition to what he before favoured, and in his eagerness to correct the abuses he before countenanced. Thus "Zaccheus stood and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold."* The zeal of such converts is often judged of with little charity, and every thing like indiscretion in the expression of it is eagerly seized by the scoffer, and by those who are hardening their necks and refusing to return; but let not this discourage them: and while it makes them humble and cautious, let them know that the candid will ascribe

* Luke xix. 8.

their peculiar antipathy to the excesses in which they once indulged, to the strong impressions the Spirit of conviction hath given them of their enormity, and to the experience which they have had of their baneful results.

III. Let us now consider the circumstances which render this conversion peculiarly striking.

1. It is the conversion of an atrocious sinner. The sentiment has been sometimes thrown out, that the more wicked a man is he is the more likely to be made a trophy of grace. A more dangerous idea can hardly be conceived. In vain do they who speak in this manner boast of their high admiration of the riches of pardoning mercy, and of their wish to magnify the Saviour. It makes the grace of the Gospel the encouragement of presumption; it is subversive of all morality, and has led many to excesses in sin which have brought upon them, not the salvation imagined in Antinomian delusion, but wrath to the uttermost. That grace hath sanctified and saved some notorious offenders is true, but wo to him who indulges himself in iniquity in expectation of such a result!

There are two considerations which show that the conversion of such persons is most unlikely. The strength of their attachment to sin is such that no ordinary means are likely to break it; and such is the obduracy of the heart, and such the searedness of the conscience of such persons, that, amidst methods by which others are melted into sorrow, or roused to salutary terror, they remain unmoved. And I may

that aggravated offences are peculiarly dis-
uring to God, excite his highest displeasure,
all forth his justice to the exemplary punish-
t of the transgressor.

w wonderful does the conversion of Manasseh
ar after these considerations! He wrought much
the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger;
olatries which he practised were of the most
ious and insulting description; and such was
rrid zeal in the diffusion of them, and of the
inations committed in the observance of them,
ne made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem
r and to do worse than the heathen whom the
had destroyed before the children of Israel.
lost to feeling must have been the heart which
sacrifice his own children, and which could en-
join the burning of infants to Moloch! He was the bloody persecutor of all who disapproved of these proceedings, and is said to have murdered Isaiah, the prophet of the Most High, the friend and the counsellor of his father. His offences too were aggravated by the circumstance, that they were not committed by one trained up to such deeds from his early years, but by one whose childhood had been spent under the lessons, and prayers, and pious and beneficent conduct of a most excellent father; yet such a monster of wickedness was formed to piety, and was cleansed from all unrighteousness. The New Testament presents us with instances of the power of grace as conspicuous, and stated in a way admirably fitted to check the abuse of them by the presumptuous, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit

the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."*

2. It is the conversion of an aged sinner. The remark has been often made, and it is dictated by just views of human nature, as well as by experience, that few are converted in old age. The faculties are then feeble and languid, and it is not to be supposed that the attention can then be strongly excited, or the affections deeply engaged, even by the most vivid representations of truth. Such, too, is the power of bad habits, and so difficult is it to make the man long thoughtless serious, or the slave of avarice or sensuality temperate or liberal, that the Scripture thus speaks of it:—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."†

The long resistance which such a man hath given to the influence of the Spirit of God may be supposed so displeasing to him as to induce him to give him over to a reprobate mind. Such was the effect of the continued provocations of Israel in the wilderness,—"Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: unto whom I

* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. † Jer. xiii. 23.

sware in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest."*

Yet though Manasseh had long gone on frowardly in the way of his heart, the grace of God saved him. Justly might Jehovah have said to him,—"Go to the gods whom thou hast chosen, and let them deliver thee in the time of thy tribulation;" but instead of this he makes mercy to rejoice over judgment, and gave a splendid demonstration for the benefit of all ages that he is able to save to the uttermost. The general character given in Scripture of Manasseh's reign, and the little he was able to accomplish, as to the reformation of his people after his conversion, strongly indicate that it took place when he was far advanced in life.

We have another striking instance of conversion in advanced life in the case of Nicodemus. His words to our Lord intimate that he had arrived at that period, "How can a man be born when he is old?"† yet there was this difference betwixt him and Manasseh, that he had lived in external rectitude and sobriety. It was, however, a signal triumph of the grace of God, that he was made to relinquish his Pharisaic prejudices and his legal righteousness, and to enrol himself among the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. We would look with wonder at the rotten tree assuming freshness and beauty; but much more astonishing is the change which grace produces, in making those who were like trees twice dead, to abound in the fruits of righteousness.

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* Ps. xcv. 10, 11. † John iii. 4.

3. It was a conversion which took place at a distance from the ordinary means of grace. It was not in the temple at Jerusalem, nor amidst rites of worship adapted to solemnize the mind, to impress the heart with a sense of guilt, or to encourage the hope of pardon through the merits of the Messiah. It did not take place in consequence of the rebukes and warnings of the prophets of the Lord, or in scenes rich in the memorials of his father's piety, but in a heathen country, where he had it not in his power to observe the appointed rites and sacrifices, where there was not a single prophet to address him in the name of the Lord, and where, it is likely, he had no copy of the word and law of God to convince him of sin, righteousness, and judgment; yet, in the absence of all these outward means, the Spirit of the Lord wrought mightily on him, and he became a new creature in Christ Jesus. That grace which visited John in the solitude of Patmos to comfort, visited Manasseh in his imprisonment at Babylon to save.

There have been instances of a similar kind in our own days. There have been persons, who, in their native country, were careless in their attendance on the means of grace, and not merely slighters of the great salvation, but disposed to scoff at things serious, and to walk in the counsel of the ungodly; but, in distant climes, and amidst the pressure of disease, they have thought of the word of salvation which they once slighted, and have sunk in penitence and love at the feet of the Redeemer. No pious monitor was near them; but a voice from on high called them to reflection, and taught them to

pray. The image of a father frowning on their excesses, and warning them of their results, or of a mother in tears at their folly, and entreating them to be wise for the time to come, rises before the mind and urges on them the lessons of grace. The psalms, questions, and texts committed to memory in their childhood, and which have been long out of view, now return to the mind, and, with a tenderness arising from the sweetness of the scenes with which they were associated, gently lead the soul to the gates of wisdom. Mercy can work by any means, and will follow its objects wherever they wander.

CONCLUSION.

Let aged transgressors think of the conversion of Manasseh, and let it teach them not to despair. The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that it cannot hear. Be persuaded to imbibe the spirit and to adopt the language of the Apostle Paul,—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."* The remarks which he makes on his own conversion is applicable to that of Manasseh; howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. O think under what a load of guilt you will sink into hell, if you do perish; and if you perish it will be without excuse and without remedy. An

* 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

aged sinner still delaying, how infatuated! An aged sinner still despising salvation, how criminal!

How happy are aged saints! Very different are your feelings from the regrets and the fears of the late convert. In them we see the sun after a dark and stormy day shining feebly over a scene drenched and desolate; but in your case we see the sun after a long course of splendour going down in beauty amidst gilded clouds, and shedding the softest lustre over the scene it has enriched, and gladdened, and adorned. In looking back on your past life you see indeed much to lament, but you see much to ascribe to sanctifying grace; and, while others record how you have served your own generation according to the will of God, your rejoicing is this, the testimony of your consciences, that in simplicity and in godly sincerity you have had your conversation in the world.

Let none abuse the conversion of Manasseh to encourage themselves in delaying repentance in the hope of obtaining mercy in their old age. How careful are the Scriptures to guard against such abuse, by the most solemn warnings after the triumphs of grace! Thus, after the Psalmist hath said,—"He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death;" he adds,—"But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."* How awful is that sentence,—"The sinner an hundred years old shall be accursed!"

* Psalm lxviii. 20, 21.

Now, then, set your hearts to seek the Lord your God. You cannot be too soon released from the thraldom of the devil, and secured from the damnation of hell. None is so likely to die in his iniquities as the presumptuous sinner. You will not always have grace to slight or a Saviour to refuse. Repent now, therefore, and believe the Gospel, and you shall be monuments of the power and grace of him whose name is Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.

Finally, Let not those who have escaped the grosser pollutions of the world imagine that they need no repentance. Consider, that, however blameless you may be as to your dealings with men, there is a God with whom you have to do, and to whom you owe affections and duties to which you are utter strangers. You may not profane his name, you may attend on his public worship, but you feel not that supreme love which he claims, and his place in the heart you give to another. All that Jesus Christ hath done for man hath never awakened in you one spark of holy gratitude—hath never led you to make one sacrifice for his name and cause. You are indifferent to the beauties of his example, enemies to the glories of his cross, and despisers of the riches of his grace. You are puffed up with a vain confidence, which dishonours him and will ruin you. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all those also who forget God. Come then to the cross as guilty sinners; trust in its blood for acceptance and safety, and receive its spirit for holiness and peace. If ever you are saved it must be through grace, and to the praise of its glory.

This is the blessed history of all who are in heaven or on the right way to it, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should

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* Eph. ii. 8, 9.

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This is the blessed history of all who are in heaven or on the right way to it, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast."*

* Eph. ii. 8, 9.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE BENEDICTION OF THE AGED.

klviii. 15, 16. *And he blessed Joseph, and God before whom my fathers Abraham and walk, the God which fed me all my life s day, the Angel which redeemed me evil, bless the lads; and let my name be m them, and the name of my fathers Abra- d Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude he midst of the earth.*

sacred writers excel in the delineation of family nes. To the heart corrupted by luxury, or inflated by vain glory, these may appear low and uninteresting; but to the pure and the benevolent mind they possess a charm which is not to be found in all the parade of wealth and greatness. We see in them nature in its kindest movements, and feel those incidents recalled in which the heart first opened, and on which, amidst all the transactions of the most eventful life, it delights to dwell. Religion, too, is shown by the sacred writers filling the abodes of the pious with the voice of rejoicing and salvation, giving purity to affection and wisdom to admonition, and shedding over the gloomiest scenes of trouble and separation solace and utility.

The scene which the text presents is one of the most interesting which can occur in families. It is

drawn in so vivid a manner, that, when we view it, we think we see the pale countenance of the patriarch beaming with gratitude and affection, and listen to the language which the feelings of nature and the inspiration of prophecy drew from his lips.

Joseph had heard that his father was sick, and he comes to see him with his two sons. Instead of deeming this an improper intrusion on his last hours, exhausted as he was by infirmity and tossed with sickness, he stretches out his arms to embrace them, and kissed them, and said, in language full of tenderness and joy, "I had not thought to see thy face; and now God hath shewed me also thy seed." To these young persons his heart went forth; on them he lays his heaven-directed hands; and in this attitude pronounces the blessing in the text. Unlike his account of his life to Pharaoh, which is deeply tinged with melancholy, his language here breathes nothing but thankfulness and satisfaction; and, unlike the gloomy forebodings and vindictive threats which have sometimes filled up the last testimony of the aged, it opens the most delightful prospects of prosperity. What a happy old man! His heart and his flesh were failing—the tomb of his fathers was opening for him, —but he felt that in these children his name should be perpetuated on earth; and beheld Abraham and Isaac beckoning to him to sit down by them in the mansions of rest. And happy were these youths! On them rests the blessing of him who, as a prince, had power with God and prevailed; and by the cords of love they are drawn to the service of the God of Jacob. As we view this scene, let "one say, I am the

Lord's; let another call himself by the name of Jacob; and let another subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."*

In this discourse I shall call your attention to the views which Jacob took of the Divine character and procedure in this benediction, to its objects, and to its import and value.

I. Let us then consider the views which Jacob took of the Divine character and procedure.

1. Jacob regards Jehovah as the God before whom his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk. Of all the terms by which a religious life is described, none is more appropriate than this. Some have considered this as a vulgar and antiquated phrase, and they employ epithets to express it which they deem more elegant and agreeable; but the words which they use show, that of it they have the most defective conceptions, and that their piety is destitute of elevation and tenderness. That squeamishness of taste which makes men disrelish the expressions in which the Bible sets out a life of godliness, is the effect or the pretext of that carnality of mind which is enmity against God.

But what doth the term walking before God imply?—It intimates, that, in the whole of our conduct, we must be influenced by a regard to the Divine presence and authority. In the transactions of business we must view him as the witness of our deal-

* Isaiah xliv. 5.

ings; in the intercourse of friendship, as the searcher of our hearts; in the settlement of our families, as the appointer of the bounds of our habitation; in the enjoyment of prosperity, as the God of salvation, who loads us with his benefits; and in bearing our trials, as a wise father who chastens us for our profit. Whatever we do, we must do it heartily as to the Lord, and not to man; and this must be done habitually. The good man's piety is not a transitory feeling, or an occasional act of homage, for he sets the Lord always before him. The love of God is ever in his heart, and the glory of God in his eye. Business without him would be a most intolerable drudgery; friendship the snare of treachery, not the bond of perfectness; prosperity the incitement to pride and folly; and affliction the messenger of wrath and despair.

Religion is called a walking with God, to point out that intercourse with him by which it is marked; a walking in him to express that conformity and that relation to him in which it mainly consists; and a walking before him, to show that the saint acts as in his presence, and as accountable to him. It strikingly intimates, that religion lies not in aught that is fantastic or extravagant, but in a demeanour marked by calmness, sobriety, and order.

Now, such was the life of Abraham and Isaac, and such was their piety. Though surrounded by idolatry and superstition, they worshipped God in spirit and in truth. Wherever they went, their first care was to raise an altar for his service; they acknowledged him in all their ways, and were attentive to

every intimation of his will. Such was Abraham's intercourse with the Deity, that he obtained the most honourable title ever borne by mortals,—"The friend of God." When Jacob thought of them, his mind dwelt not on such circumstances as these,—that they abounded in wealth—that kings honoured them with their friendship—and that armies had been scattered by their prowess—but on their piety. Religion is the brightest figure in the escutcheon, and without this it is an empty show; it is the noblest line in the epitaph, and without this it is but words of vanity. What though ancestors were clothed in purple and scarlet, though multitudes bowed before them, and though they engrossed ever so much of the public attention, their glory shall not go with them to the dust, but the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. The idea of their piety shall direct the eye of respect to their grave, and bring from every lip blessings on their name. Sweet are the recollections which the piety of parents calls up in every scene in which they mingled. Here the prayer of faith was poured out, and this is the couch which godly sorrow watered with tears; here their candour checked the harshness of censure, and their patience gloried in tribulation. These are the texts which the heart believed to righteousness, and these are the sacrifices which they made rather than let go their integrity. Such persons are entombed in the heart, and to them is devoted the sigh of affection and the tribute of gratitude. The pleasure with which Jacob reflects on the piety of his father and grandfather is a striking proof of his own. A wicked child

cannot think of holy parents when no more, but as ashamed of his folly, or frowning on his crimes. On such a man's cheek remembrance must kindle the blush of shame, and stir up in his conscience tribulation and anguish; but the pious child feels that their mantle has fallen on his shoulders, and that his heart is the abode of their virtues. Whatever may be forgotten with respect to them, their piety is remembered. If the warrior's sword is shown from age to age as a memorial of his heroism, if the work of learning is kept with care, and the laurel is not suffered to wither that grows on the grave of departed genius, much more regard should the pious show to the altars which their ancestors reared to the Most High,—the memorials which they set up of his goodness,—the covenants in which they gave themselves to the Lord,—the objects they directed by their counsel and blessed by their alms,—and the books in which are to be seen the traces of their purposes and feelings.

There were two reasons why Jacob mentioned this piety of Abraham and Isaac in this blessing.

1. He did it to recommend the imitation of it to his grandsons, and to let them see that this alone would ensure the blessing, and that thus alone would they live in the hearts of their posterity. He did it also to encourage his own confidence in the happiness of his descendants; for it was in testimony of his complacency in their piety that God had promised to be their God and the God of their seed; and we may believe that Jacob felt the persuasion, that the piety in which they were so eminent here, was now shining

in a higher sphere, and that they dwelt with God in that city which hath foundations, for which they looked, in all their wanderings, with such hope and desire.

2. Jacob acknowledges Jehovah as the God who had fed him all his life long to this day. In the kindness of his parents he beheld the agency of his God; and when a wanderer from his father's house, the Lord was his guide. From small beginnings the Lord had raised him to prosperity and honour. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." He was often in outward straits, but never forsaken; and in the commencement of the sore famine the prospects of his family were very gloomy, but he obtained by his sons supplies from Egypt again and again, and at length a comfortable settlement there by the side of his generous and dutiful son. How beautiful was the kindness of Joseph, who sent to his father ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with corn, and bread, and meat, for his father by the way; and there, during the seventeen years that remained of his life, he was sustained by Joseph! Some, under the impulse of excited feeling, will heap kindnesses on aged relatives, who become weary of them under protracted infirmity; but Joseph, amidst all the temptations of the world, and the pressure of public duty, cherished his father with unabated care during all that period. It is seldom that the aged are left so long dependent and helpless; but when they are, the affectionate attention of children is but a repayment of their care of their infancy and youth, and is

demanded as strongly by justice as it is by compassion.

You will observe, that Jacob ascribes nothing to his own skill, industry, and perseverance. He had not eaten the bread of idleness, but had been distinguished by his steady activity in the management of his worldly affairs; yet he acknowledges the agency of God in his success: and tenderly as he felt the generous care of his son, he ascribes his support to that Divine mercy of which the kindness of Joseph was the result and the instrument. The Divine mercy supplied him in the bounties, soothed him in the voice, and upheld him in the arms of his darling son.

Let us make a similar acknowledgment. Let none think it enough to say, I have had kind friends who patronised me; for it was God who gave them power to aid you, warmed their heart with kindness, and kept their love from waxing cold. Had it not been for him, you would have found, not protection in their care, but misery in their neglect or hatred. Say not, My prosperity hath been owing to my own efforts; I have risen early and sat up late, and eaten the bread of carefulness; by ingenious contrivances I have rendered the most difficult tasks easy, and by sober habits I have maintained my capacity and my relish for labour. Remember that prudence is God's gift, that it is he who controls the appetites and passions, and makes the sleep of toil sweet, and that he is the preserver of man and of beast.

Let none think it enough to say, I was left in com-

fortable circumstances by my parents, and in these I have remained; but why was it that your eyes saw not the light in the hovel of poverty? and to whom was it owing that you had any portion bequeathed to you but penury and rags? Who has kept the canker from your gold and the moth from your garments? Who has protected your wealth from the snare of treachery or the fangs of violence? It is He who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.

This acknowledgment is especially required from the families and the individuals who, in seasons of scarcity, have been borne through by the care of Providence. Your difficulties and fears were many, but God made darkness light before you, and crooked things straight; your earnings were small, but he made your little better to you in real use and enjoyment than the riches of many wicked; your fare was coarse and scanty, but it was made wholesome to you and yours, like the pulse of Daniel. You had to part with many things which you once deemed essential to your comfort; but you have never felt the want of them, or he has brought them back to you; and what though your prospects should again be darkened by the stagnation of commerce, the failure of harvests, the calamities of war, or the tumults of the people, recollecting the past care of God, and trusting in the mercy which endureth for ever, you may sing, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat;

the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."*

Beautiful is this testimony to God's care from the lips of age! It strikes the discontented dumb, and fills the fearful with confidence. Sweet is it to hear the old man saying, "My pilgrimage has been long, but the sunshine of mercy gladdened the whole of it; its warmth was not always the same, neither was its light, but never did it leave me without a witness; and now, in going down to the gate of the grave, it shows me the path of life!"

3. He devoutly acknowledges Christ as his redeeming angel. It is obvious that by this angel is meant the Mediator between God and man. Though he took not on him the nature of angels, he sometimes assumed their name, because, like them, he is employed in ministering to the protection and the comfort of his people. This title is given to him by his Father,—"Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him."† To point out that he is the Superior of angels, he is called the Angel of the covenant, the Angel of his presence, and the Head of all principalities and powers.

It is quite plain, from the text, that Christ was known to the patriarchs as a distinct person from the

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* Hab. iii. 17, 18. † Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.

Father, and yet one with him in essence and in the benediction of men. He is joined with God in this prayer as the object of worship and of hope. That astonishing scene, in which Isaac was about to be sacrificed by his father, at the command of God, we may believe, had been often the subject of his conversation with Jacob; and the mysteries of Divine love which it represented, and the lessons of submission to God which it enforced, would be carefully pointed out. In it Jehovah was seen not sparing his own Son, but delivering him up for us all,—giving, in sacrifice for us, not the noblest of his creatures, but the Son of his bosom, and making his death the fountain of our life and salvation.

This Angel had delivered Jacob in many perilous situations. He suffered not the wild beast to devour him while he slumbered in the open fields, and rescued him from the craft and jealousy of Laban, and from the fury and revenge of his wicked brother. Deliverances from temporal evils are called redemption, because they come to us through the ransom paid for us in the blood of Christ. The deliverances in the life of Jacob were to him pledges of this eternal redemption, and illustrations of its virtue. He felt that all his mercies came to him by the hand and for the sake of the Redeemer.

Jacob's faith anticipated the redemption which was to be wrought in the fulness of time, and appropriated its blessings to himself. Abraham saw the day of the Messiah afar off, and was glad; and Jacob could not be ignorant of it. In the vision of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, he beheld him

who is the way, the truth, and the life. In a little while he declares that Shiloh should come, and that to him should the gathering of the people be; and this was his dying appeal to the Most High,—"I have waited for thy salvation, O God." He had obtained many of the blessings of redemption already, and had such assurance of possessing what remained, that he speaks of them as already his; and this strengthened his hope of God's kindness to his seed. On promises thus ratified he might safely confide, and to grace thus exceedingly abundant he might commit every interest.

This language of Jacob may be adopted by every saint of God; for in him we have redemption through his blood. This is a redemption from all the guilt of sin, for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; and from all its power, for sin shall not have dominion over you. It is a redemption from our spiritual enemies, for Christ hath broken the yoke of our burden and the rod of our oppression. Satan may tempt, but he shall not enslave; he may threaten, but he shall not destroy. Corruption may struggle, but it shall not prevail; the world may allure, but your hearts shall not be captivated: it may rage, but your souls shall be fearless. In this redemption there is deliverance from the evil of affliction. Sickness may waste the beauty, pain may vex the bones, and misfortunes bring the substance to nought; but amid sickness the soul shall be in health, in pain we shall have rest in Christ, and in poverty we shall be rich towards God. It is a redemption also from all that is evil in death. In the sting of

death there is no poison. A good man can suffer the bonds of death to be fixed on him, saying, "God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me." It is a deliverance from the wrath to come.

II. Let us now attend to the objects of the benediction. They were the two sons of Joseph, and were peculiarly dear to Jacob for their father's sake. In bringing them to receive this blessing, I see the wisdom, piety, and holy solicitude of their father. Joseph was possessed of great wealth in Egypt, and could leave them an ample portion of this world's goods; but he knew the uncertainty of prosperity, and he wished to have these earthly advantages established and secured by the special favour of Heaven. Much as he possessed of the friendship and the confidence of Pharaoh, and strong as was his title to the gratitude and the respect of the Egyptians, he knew too well the caprice of the great, and the instability of the populace, to place much dependence on them for his own prosperity, and far less would he trust to them for that of his descendants. He wished that they might obtain wisdom to improve their advantages for the glory of God and for the public good. In this use of them he anticipated their stability, and he desired the grace needful for this purpose to be asked in the prayers of a dying father, as it had often been in his own.

Joseph was aware of the utter insufficiency of this world to give happiness. He had felt, amidst the smiles of Pharaoh and the homage of the people,

that he could only be blessed in the light of God's countenance; and he wished them to obtain those spiritual blessings by which earthly comforts are rendered doubly sweet, and in the enjoyment of which their absence is neither felt nor regarded. I may add, too, that he intended this scene to operate as an antidote to the dissipations of the court of Pharaoh. His station called him to mingle in the festivities and gaieties of that court, and by the grace of God he had kept himself unspotted from the world. We may believe that he had often warned those young men of the perils of such a scene; and nothing seemed better adapted to show the vanity of the world than a death-bed, and the moral dignity of true religion than the faith and hope of their venerable grandfather. Jacob strengthening himself, and sitting on the bed, was a more dignified object than Pharaoh on his throne; and Jacob worshipping, leaning on the top of his staff, than Pharaoh extending his golden sceptre. He wished them to carry the remembrance of this scene with them as a corrective to the enchantments of pleasure and to the impulse of ambition.

Those young men were at a period of life when the lessons of such a scene were most necessary. The gay fancies of youth must be repressed by grave admonition, its vain conceits mortified by humbling discipline, and its ardent passions regulated by a judicious control. If this is not done, these fancies will render the sober realities of life disgusting; these conceits will check their improvement, and these passions will hurry them to destruction; and na-

lmonition to be got more solemn, dis-
ne more salutary, or control more effectual, than
house of mourning.

y were now at a period of life when such scenes
ly to make the deepest impression. Their
ts were not yet hardened by the deceitfulness of
or was the susceptibility of youthful feeling yet
in the contests of ambition. With such scenes
were not yet familiar. It was perhaps the first
bed scene they had witnessed, and was of such
racter as to be recollected amidst all the after-
nces of mortality which they witnessed, and con-
d in its simplicity and power with their dark
s and vain superstitions.

title which Jacob gives to them deserves no-
As the children of a man so high in station and
nuence, they might have pompous titles; but Ja-
cob gives them no name to flatter their vanity or to
excite his own, but designates them with that sim-
plicity so becoming in one on the verge of the grave:
neither does he apply to them any of those epithets
of fondness which the old are often disposed to give
to their descendants to whom they are attached. The
sobriety of this language accords well with the holy
character of the scene; and the blessings he invoked
on them, and the course which he pointed out to
them, would be felt as more valuable testimonies of
affection than the kindest epithets which language
could supply. Affection is felt strongest in the hour
of separation; but with the pious it is manifested in
the fidelity of admonition and in the earnestness of
prayer.

III. Let us now consider the benediction itself.

It is to be viewed as a prayer. And he does not pray that Pharaoh might favour them, or that they might occupy the highest stations in his court; he was convinced that no creature could bless them. This is the sole prerogative of God, and he implores him to exercise it in their behalf; that he would endow them with the graces of his spirit as their best distinction, enrich them with his favour as their best portion, and shield them by his protection as their best defence; that they might be a credit to their father and a blessing to their people; that their life might be long and useful, and that they might, at death, be received into everlasting glory.

It was his prayer, too, that his name might be named on them, that name Israel, which was given to him on account of his devotedness to prayer, and his success in it. This was an expression of his wish that they might be distinguished by the spirit of prayer and by the answer of prayer. This wish was not dictated by vanity, but by the desire which he felt that they might be influenced by the designation which they bore to the culture of enlightened and zealous devotion. His heart sighed at the thought that the world around him was wholly given to idolatry, and it was his earnest desire that such might be the habitual piety maintained by his offspring from age to age, as to attach to them this character,—"This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob."

The court of Egypt had many pompous titles, but none of them in true glory could be compared with

this time. That land presents many indications of the vanity of human glory. The pyramids remain, but their object and the names of their builders are lost in oblivion. The inward thought of worldly men is, that their houses shall continue to all generations, and they call their lands by their own names; nevertheless, man being in honour abideth not, but the name of Israel remains on the Jewish people and institutions to this day.

He prayed, too, that the name of Abraham and of Isaac might be named on them; that is, that they might have a place in the covenant made with them, might inherit their privileges, and walk in their steps; that the circumcision which marked their descent from Abraham might be to them a seal of the righteousness of faith; that they might be as noted for their homage to the true God as they were; that, wherever they abode, they might, like them, dwell under the shadow of the Almighty; and that they might have an eternal inheritance in that better country which they regarded as their home, and of whose blessedness they found only an earnest and an emblem in Canaan.

And the prayer is closed by the expression of his wish, that they might grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth, that their line might be continued, and that their posterity might flourish, and that, by the religious worship which they maintained amidst the idolatries around them, they might be as a light shining on a dark place. Happy as they now were, he anticipated for them a territory and a power of their own, in which the vine brought from Egypt

should fill the land of Canaan, cover the hills with its shadow, and send out its boughs to the sea.

But this benediction is to be viewed also as a prediction. The mind of the patriarch was at this moment under supernatural influence, and he was enabled to declare the lot of his descendants with minuteness and precision. These were not the dreams of fancy, the flatteries of presumption, the reveries of dotage, or the oracles of imposture, but the revelations of him who seeth the end from the beginning. Jacob was now acting under a higher impulse than that of imagination, or hope, or mere sagacity; he was speaking under divine inspiration, and, accordingly, Paul numbers this benediction among the brightest triumphs of faith.—"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.* Distant as was the period, and unlikely to human view as the accomplishment of the prediction was, he beheld them settled in Canaan, a peculiar, a prosperous, and a happy people. It is a very striking fact, that these two tribes increased more than any of the rest. Even in the times of Moses the number of them was 85,200 men fit for war, and their situation was in the middle of the land of Canaan.

It is a very beautiful circumstance, that this benediction of his sons is called blessing Joseph. Their honour and happiness would be his. A parent's chief felicity is in the blessedness of his children. The mother that came to Christ in behalf of her afflicted

* Heb. xi. 21.

daughter, thus addressed him,—"Have mercy on me, for my daughter is grievously vexed."* Such is the power of that sympathy which interests parents in all that befalls children, that their hearts are wrung at every pang they feel, and they experience emotions of delight at every indication that they are happy. Joseph's happiness in his brethren had arisen not from them, but from his own generous conduct to them; and it was Jacob's wish, that his happiness in his own family might compensate him for all that he had suffered from them, and that he might be as happy as a father as he had been dutiful as a son. Such was the benediction of this patriarch; as a prayer, it was dictated by the Spirit of grace and supplication, and as a prediction, it was a declaration of his purpose, whose counsel shall stand. It is pregnant with all that prosperity desired by worldly men, and with those spiritual mercies which are the chief good of the heirs of salvation.

There were, doubtless, many things peculiar to Jacob in this benediction arising from the special promises made to him, and the inspiration of the Almighty under which he spoke; but it shows that aged persons should implore the Divine blessing on the relatives whom they are about to leave. It is surely proper that they should ask from God in their behalf that measure of worldly good things which will secure them from the temptations of poverty on the one hand, and the corrupting influence of luxury on the other; that God may give them the heritage of them

* Matt. xv. 22.

that fear him; that the evil principles, which, working within them, have occasioned them so many anxieties and alarms, may be subdued; that they may be guided through the snares which vice and treachery may form for them; that, by the comforts of religion, they may be supported under the temptations common to man; that the worship of the Most High may never be put away from their dwelling, but may be maintained with increasing zeal, and solemnity, and advantage; that they may glorify God more amply than they have done; that they may leave an example of Christian excellence as an inheritance to their children; and that they may sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of our Father.

Providence hath given many proofs of the influence of the last blessing of the pious. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much at all times; but there are some things which give it peculiar efficacy at his death. It is a prayer in which his heart is deeply interested, in which faith and love strongly work, which is characterized by more than common importunity, and the fulfilment of which reflects peculiar lustre on the Divine compassion, and on the close of a well-spent life.

It has often been fulfilled in the spiritual and eternal felicity of the young; and when this is not the case, it procures them exemption from many miseries in the present state, and obtains for them many comforts. It brings down upon these olive-plants that dew from the Lord which suffers not their beauty to decay, or their labour to fail. Often has the provi-

dence of God interposed for children thus blessed in a manner which has struck all around. The patrons who assist, the friends who encourage, the angels who guard them, are the instruments of Providence in fulfilling the declaration of his word,—"The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."* Even when such children have been led forth with the workers of iniquity, the Almighty abandons them with reluctance, saying,—"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" Often hath it been seen, that when the misconduct of such persons hath provoked God to correct and to humble them, the remembrance of the relation which his mercy had formed betwixt himself and their fathers hath made him say,—"Is Ephraim, my dear son, is he a pleasant child? my bowels are troubled for him, and I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord."†

CONCLUSION.

How clearly are they refuted by this passage who entertain degrading ideas of the private affections of domestic life. Universal benevolence is the darling theme of some; and, unable or unwilling to discover the consistency of this with the workings of friendship or of natural affection, they speak of these as contracting the heart, and rendering it indifferent to the welfare of all but those who move in a narrow circle. The charity which they extol is that which forgets family and friends, and devotes itself to pub-

* Psalm cii. 23. † Jer. xxxi. 20.

lic utility. It is said, that no private feeling checks the ardour of the true philanthropist in goodness; and, instead of having his dying moments engrossed with those anxieties about relations, which, at such a season, harass weak and contracted minds, his last wishes are for the happiness of his species, and his spirit, rising above the interest of the surrounding scene, soars to heaven with the request, that light and virtue, freedom and peace, may be as extensive as the dwellings of human beings. In opposition to such romantic declamation it may be stated, that he on whose heart the claims of kindred make no impression is a stranger to the spirit of goodness, and that he who can part from them in death without the least anxiety for their welfare, is regardless of the last duties of a social being. It is in a family that the stream of charity first yields refreshment and beauty, which afterwards spreads its blessings far and wide. View the good man in his life, and you will see him a public blessing by his example, influence, and prayers, while he provides especially for the spiritual and temporal happiness of his own; and view him on his death-bed, and while zeal for his Saviour's honour dictates the prayer,—"Let the whole earth be filled with his glory," his heart clings, like that of Jacob, to his surrounding family, nor can he quit them till he has implored for them the best of blessings.

Let us all be properly influenced by the views we have taken of the Divine mercy. Let us be humbled on this account, that we have so often overlooked and so poorly improved the Divine kindness. Often hath thanksgiving been a mere form, and often has chur-

lishness and selfishness withheld that which the honour of God and the misery of the unhappy demanded. Cast thy bread now on the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days. God fills not your barns with plenty, nor does he make your presses to burst with new wine, that you may live in pleasure, but that you may give wine to him that is of a heavy heart, and bread to the man that is ready to perish.

Let the angel of the covenant who hath done so much for you be the object of your continued trust. Has he redeemed you from so many evils, and can you doubt his power to save you in future? No enemy can resist his power, who took the prey from the Mighty. Has he taken you from the fearful pit and from the miry clay, and will he be unable to redeem you from the power of the grave? Imitate him in your efforts to rescue those who are in situations of danger and distress. If it is in the power of your hand to liberate the prisoner, whose sorrowful sighing has come up before you, or to protect the helpless from the stroke of oppression, be not reluctant to do it, but think of him who is afflicted in all our afflictions, and redeemed us in his love and pity. Give to this Redeemer your supreme love and homage. No benefactor can be compared with him, and no privilege can be likened to this redemption. You see this redemption not in indications scanty and obscure, but in narratives vivid and circumstantial, in revelations ample and clear, in commemorations expressive and solemn, and in blessings various and important. Let the redeemed of the Lord say in the face of every foe, of every trouble, and of their last enemy, "Bless the

Lord, O my soul, who redeemeth thy life from destruction;" and you shall soon say, in an assembly, where, amidst the most wonderful variety in character and circumstances, redemption shall be seen to be in all rich in grace and bright in glory, "Salvation to our God that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

Let this subject recommend to us all walking before God. This hath been the practice of the best of men, of those to whom the feeling mind looks up with veneration and love. Let us think of its advantages and comforts. In arduous duties, how animating is the thought, the Lord is a witness of our struggles; and when we have none to take our part, how encouraging is the thought, the Mighty Lord is on my side! Amidst temptations to secret wickedness, this reflection will keep us from yielding to give even one wishful look to the forbidden object,—"Thou, God, seest me." Let it not be said, that this will bring an awe and horror over the spirit which will keep us from every pleasing scene, or make them hateful to us, "like songs to a heavy heart." The Being before whom the saint walks is a Father; and as well might you say, that the eye of a parent would damp the satisfaction of a virtuous child, as that the inspection of Jehovah would sadden the spirit of the pious. Think not that the attainment of the patriarchs is beyond the reach of ordinary Christians; for the same grace by which they were actuated is sufficient for you, and the way of the Lord is strength to the upright.

This subject suggests various exhortations to the

young. If ye are walking in the steps of pious fathers, you may cherish the fullest assurance of the blessing. Show the same diligence in the work of the Lord which they manifested; on you they will look with complacency, and every act of obedience will call forth new acknowledgments to Him who is with you as he was with them.

But there are some young persons, descended from pious parents, who walk in the ways of sinners, and it must be gross presumption in them to expect the fulfilment of a father's blessing in such a course. Could the lips which once blessed you speak to you from the grave, they would upbraid you with your folly, and say,—"Know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." The God who fed them will soon refuse you the least relief in your misery, and the angel that redeemed them from all evil shall punish you with everlasting destruction from his presence. By a father's vows, and by a mother's tears, I entreat you to forsake the foolish and to walk in the way of understanding.

Let the young, like the two sons of Joseph, be willing to go to the scene of wisdom, however dark to nature. Even though you were called to witness the frame of an aged relative disfigured by decay, or the mind sunk in dotage, this would be useful as a preservative from the vanity to which youth is so prone. "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart." "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourn-

ing: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools."*

And let not the children of the irreligious be deterred from coming to Jesus; neither let them say no parent careth for my soul; they never taught me to fear the Lord, and in my behalf they never bent the knee before him. Jesus gathers the outcasts of Israel to himself, he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, and on you the blessing of Abraham shall come. Your conversion may be blessed for turning your parents to the Lord, if they yet live; and, at any rate, it will keep that part of misery from falling on them, if they are gone, which must arise from your dying in your iniquity, and from your blood being required at their hand.

Finally, let aged believers cherish every recollection favourable to piety, and let them act so that their sons and daughters will feel a delight in bringing their children to their side; that they will take pleasure in seeing them standing by your chair, or in approaching to your couch. The wise and serious will value the pious advice which you give to your grandchildren far more than any present of money or goods which you can make them. Suspect them not of bringing their children before you from mercenary motives, and guard against the extremes of credulity and jealousy; for the one is the result of a weak mind, the other of a proud heart.

There may be aged persons before me whose con-

* Eccl. vii. 4, 5.

sciences are saying,—The fear of the Lord is neither in me nor mine; I must soon part from my children, and I dread that it will be with no other prospect than of meeting again in hell to torment each other in punishment as we have hardened each other in sin. But for you God still waits to be gracious, and says, —Though your head has become grey in sin, yet return unto me. Obey this call, and who can tell but that the earnest efforts, which the grace that plucks the brand from the burning prompts you to make for your children's conversion, may be successful? He who can make the wilderness to blossom, and the night to shine as the day, can make you new creatures in Christ Jesus. He can change the heart of stone into flesh, and form the lip of blasphemy to prayer. On the head of the angel of the covenant may the blessings of your perishing souls come, and may you be receivers of his best blessing, which he himself thus describes:—"Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."*

* Acts iii. 26.

DISCOURSE IX.

THE EFFECTS OF CHEERFULNESS AND OF DESPONDENCY.

PROVERBS xvii. 22. *A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth up the bones.*

ONE of the most common artifices of the enemies of religion to bring it into discredit, has been to associate gloominess and terror with its spirit and exercise. In support of their statements they have adduced detached portions of its laws, and painted, in the most hideous colours, the rites of superstition. They have exhibited the monk as the prey of despondency and terror, sustaining a mere existence by the bread and the water of affliction, and imposing on himself stripes more severe than those which tyrants have inflicted on their victims. By his side they have represented the fanatic, who, amidst his strong abhorrence of the dogmas of Popery, is actuated by the bitterness and austerity of its spirit, frowning on every innocent enjoyment, cherishing the gloomiest impressions of the character of the Deity, and of the present state and future destiny of the most part of human beings, afraid to entertain any cheering hope as to himself, and howling in dust and ashes.

Nothing can be more unjust than to hold up such misguided creatures as evidences of the requirements or of the tendency of religion. Let me lead you from the cell of the monk and the austerities of the

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fanatic to the church of the living God, to the paths of wisdom, where you see the good walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost; to his feet whose hands spread peace and hope over the devout mind; and to the chamber where the penitent obtains the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness; to the couch where the sick man is to be seen rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, and continuing instant in prayer; to the retreat where the old man quietly waits for the salvation of the Lord, and blesses God for the mercies of a long life, and for the comforts shed over its close; and you will perceive the power of the Gospel to support the heart and to enliven the soul. Some good men have imagined that they were debarred from religious joy, and were doomed to spend their days in darkness and tears. This idea, resulting from a constitutional tendency to depression and terror, they have cherished when they ought to have struggled against it, and have thus unhappily exemplified the last part of the text, while the experience of others was realizing the first. But let us not form our ideas of religion from the impressions which result from bodily or from mental infirmity, but from the precepts which regulate its life, the blessings which constitute its privileges, and the promises which excite its hopes, and we will see that the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It may be of some use to show that cheerfulness is a duty which we owe to our kind Benefactor in heaven, to our brethren, and to ourselves; and that despondency and terror make the present scene

miserable, and are highly unfavourable to our preparation for another.

In this discourse I shall show what we are to understand by the terms—a merry heart and a broken spirit: I shall then illustrate the view here given of their result; and shall suggest the means which should be employed to secure a cheerful old age.

I. Let me show you what is the meaning of the terms here used—a merry heart and a broken spirit.

1. What is meant by the term—a merry heart. By this we are not to understand only or principally a gay and lively temper. This some have from nature; and when it is properly regulated, it makes life pass away under the sweetest sunshine; but too often does it lead to levities and follies in conduct, which are followed by shame and remorse. Often has the jovial man been carried by the lightness of his spirit into excesses which have been bitter as wormwood in the end. Some young persons, under the influence of excessive hilarity of spirit, have been led into indiscretions which have excited the most unfavourable impressions of their character, have lacerated the feelings of those whom Providence was calling to mourning and wo, and made themselves to be viewed as so inconsiderate as to disregard, or so cruel as to insult, the sorrows of others.

But by this merry heart is meant a heart which has been taught by the Spirit of God to seek its happiness in divine and heavenly objects, and to feel a delight in pious and beneficent exercises; which is disposed to look at the bright side of things under the influence

of contentment and hope, and at the most favourable aspect of characters under the influence of candour and charity; which rests in the care and protection of Heaven, and finds a pleasure of the noblest kind in the advancement of the Saviour's glory and of the best interests of men.

Such a heart has the best reason for cheerfulness; and in it there are various principles to preserve it from those lusts and passions which would destroy its peace. Faith keeps it from suspicion and distrust, hope from despair, and charity from that envy which is a rottenness of the bones. The love of God shed abroad in the heart makes it form the most favourable idea of every dispensation, and Christ dwelling there brightens all around by his presence. The indications of such a spirit are not boisterous laughter, or extreme ardour in amusement, but it manifests itself in the animation of hope, the efforts of kindness, and the language of praise.

2. By the broken spirit is meant a heart crushed by affliction, and which refuses to be comforted. Such is his spirit who, seeing his affairs ruined by his own folly, or the knavery of others, or by misfortunes which he could neither foresee nor prevent, sinks into utter despondence, and becomes incapable of the least effort to better his circumstances.

Such is his spirit who, seeing the desire of his eyes taken away with a stroke, and the children whom he idolized smitten in their opening beauty by the hand of death, imagines he has nought now to live for, and, in the desperate anguish of his spirit, cries,—"Oh! that thou wouldest take me from a world in which I

can never again be happy." Such also is the spirit of the man who is wounded by remorse, and rejects the relief held out in the Gospel; who thinks only on the number of his stains, but never on the cleansing virtue of the blood of Christ; on the wrath he deserves, but not on the curse which Jesus endured; on the threatenings of vengeance, but not on the offers of mercy. The voice of mercy is unheard amidst the charges of an accusing conscience, and no gleam of hope is seen amidst blackness, and darkness, and tempest.

Such is the spirit which is shattered by the influence of indulged melancholy. By injudicious modes of living, and by false ideas of the world, a gloominess of spirit has been produced which neither nature in all her vernal bloom, nor religion in all her captivating lustre, can brighten. Under its influence a man considers himself as an encumbrance in society, and saith, "I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone, for my days are vanity."

Such also is the spirit which is habitually influenced by jealousies, suspicions, and fears. Such a person can feel no pleasure in the expressions of kindness employed by others, because he views them, not merely as insincere, but as the covering of treachery; neither can any promises encourage him, because he views them as having no claims to his confidence. In situations where others repose in sweet tranquillity, he is restless and dissatisfied; and with prospects which awaken in others the most joyous expectations, he can figure nothing before him but disappointment to his best efforts, ruin to his most valued

interests, and the disruption of every bond of kindness.

II. Let me now endeavour to illustrate the view which is here given of the result of cheerfulness and depression. "The one doeth good like a medicine, the other drieth up the bones."

1. Let us consider their influence on the body. The influence of a suitable medicine on the body is wonderful. Disease is checked or alleviated by it when first received; the continued use of it removes it entirely, and strengthens the constitution to resist its further attacks. The acrimonious humours by which life would be made bitter or painful it banishes; and the prolongation of our days, as well as the happy enjoyment of them, is owing, in many cases, to its influence through the blessing of Heaven. Such is the power of holy joy over the health. It keeps us from those dark apprehensions by which disease is aggravated, and its elevating influence aids the operation of all that is administered to support the sinking pulse and the fainting heart. It protects from those fits of impatience and murmuring by which the strength is wasted; and those fretful passions and uneasy impressions, by which disease is engendered and its progress accelerated, it keeps away. It is easy to trace, in the very features of the face, the influence of the cares of avarice; and who has not marked, in the countenance of the good man, the serenity which was an encouragement to others, while it was a blessing to himself? While it preserves health, its blessed influence calms the fury of disease, and makes the

blood to flow in a gentle current, alike remote from the stagnation of despondency and the violence of impetuous passions.

This holy cheerfulness prevents those wild and extravagant transports in which the blood boils and the whole system is raised to a most unnatural state; and this shows us the kind consideration of Him who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, in so seldom elevating his people's hearts to holy rapture. Such a state would, he knows, be perilous to the earthen vessel, and would detach the believer from his humbler duties.

Figure to yourselves (and the case is neither imaginary nor uncommon) an aged saint happy still under the influence of religion. On him the infirmities of age press lightly. Like the trees which retain their green leaves amidst the desolations of winter, he remains tranquil and contented in the evil days; and, like the snowdrop which announces the commencement of spring, while all around is naked and howling, so does his cheerfulness indicate that he has received the pledges of heaven. Thus it is that God giveth power to the faint, and increaseth strength to them that have no might; thus it is that while the outward man declines, the inward man is renewed day by day; and thus it is that good men in advanced life pursue with delight their course of duty, and find that what would be deemed oppressive by the indolent, is spirit and life to them.

On the other hand, a broken spirit dries up the bones, and the firmest constitution sinks under its influence. It unfits for that exercise which is necessary for the preservation of health, takes away all r

for food, and all power to digest it for nourishment, and renders vain every effort which is made for its amusement. The lodging-place for which it seeks is the wilderness; its companions are the owl and the dragon; its music is the howl of the tempest; and around it are scattered the skulls and bones of the house of death. Not a few have died in the midst of their days of a broken heart. They became pale and emaciated,—sleep departed from their eyes,—their strength rapidly declined,—and, in spite of all the prayers of affection and the efforts of medical skill, they go to the gates of the grave. How pathetic is the lamentation which has been heard from such persons!—"O remember that my life is wind; mine eyes shall no more see good!" Nay, so horrible has been the influence of the broken spirit, that the soul has chosen strangling and death rather than life, and, impatient of what it deemed its tardy progress, has, by this last fatal effort of despair, rushed into eternity. How miserable is the exit of that wretched creature who, yielding to the solicitations of the seducer, and involving herself in guilt and ruin, finding herself an object of abhorrence to the world, and regarded as a burden by her friends, with no prospect before her but poverty and infamy, and with no disposition to godly sorrow, has recourse to self-destruction as a release from a state that was intolerable! The sorrow of the world worketh death.

2. Consider their influence on prosperity and adversity. All the comforts of prosperity are heightened by the cheerful spirit, and beautiful is the accordance of such a spirit with the advantages of our lot. So amiable does prosperity appear when thus en-

joyed, that every heart wishes its continuance; but the broken spirit is a stranger to all the satisfactions as well as the homage of gratitude. On such a heart all its delights are lavished in vain. The wine may give its colour in the cup—the field may whiten to harvest—business may yield a large return—and public favour may strive to honour,—but all is lost on the despondency which refuses to be comforted.

The cheerful heart can triumph in adversity: "We glory," saith the Apostle, "in tribulation also." Its happiness is independent of the world, and therefore it is not diminished by its frowns. It can sing the song of Habakkuk in the scene of desolation. Nor let this be thought a vain boast; for the believing Hebrews "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance."* But how different is the case with the broken spirit! Every temporal disaster is the supposed prelude to their ruin; every unfavourable opinion respecting them is the echo of the condemnation of their own consciences, and every display of the wrath of man is the forerunner of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

How fitly may this influence of the broken spirit on adversity be illustrated by the experience of Job! At first, while he acted under the influence of a mild and holy resignation, he said,—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;

* Heb. x. 34.

ssed be the name of the Lord;"* but afterwards, n the arrows of the Almighty pierced him, and ir poison drunk up his spirit, he said,—"Let the perish wherein I was born, and the night in ch it was said, There is a man child conceived."† ras then that his heart sunk under the accumula- n of sorrows, and that his soul became weary of

nsider the influence of cheerfulness and of de- n the soul. Cheerfulness quickens all the ers of the soul in their exercise; the imagina- forms the most pleasing ideas of scenes and ob- s; memory calls up the most joyous recollections; e paints the future blissful as the present; and understanding, rejoicing in the truth, pursues its uiries with unwearied ardour.

On the other hand, when the spirit is broken, the imagination calls up only scenes of wo; memory brings nought to remembrance but what tends to disquiet and torment us; despair clothes the heavens with blackness; and the understanding doth nought but write bitter things, and form the most dreadful conclusions against itself. In the one case reason is like the lamp in the prisoner's dungeon, which serves only to show him its nakedness and horrors; in the other it is like the sun gilding the scene of beauty, and disclosing all its charms to the admiring eye.

While the spirit is cheerful, the powers of the mind are kept in a sound and healthful state; but when it is broken, they become disordered or furious,

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* Job i. 20. † Ibid. iii. 3.

or sink into that languor and torpor which soon issues in total imbecility. How many are the instances which, in every place, present themselves of the fatal tendency of gloominess and melancholy! By their continued influence reason is perverted; and it not unfrequently happens, that though their false impressions be limited to one particular subject, yet their power is such as to spread darkness over every scene. Thus, the unhappy person, who imagines that he hath sinned beyond the reach of mercy, will admit the infinite value of the atonement and the riches of superabounding grace, while nothing will drive the idea from his mind, that for him there can be no pardon, and that in the cross of Jesus he dares not trust. He who imagines that he is doomed to poverty, will admit that industry may lead others to affluence, and that prudence and watchfulness will be attended with security; but in his case he conceives all diligence and all vigilance as vain.

4. Consider the influence of cheerfulness and depression on the duties and the pursuits of life. When the heart is cheerful the duties of a man's calling are a pleasure to him. He rises with alacrity from his bed, and goes out to his labour; and the hilarity of his spirit is visible in his whole appearance and manner. He that hears the ploughman whistling in the fields, or the mechanic singing at his employment in his dwelling, is struck with the thought, that they are happier than many who ride in chariots or sit on thrones. How detestable is the conduct of those who have attempted to destroy the happiness of these classes, by aggravating the real evils of their condi-

n, heaping up a long list of imaginary grievances, d kindling within them discontent and envy!

It gives us a beautiful view of the benignity of ovidence, that in employments which to us may ear disgusting or hazardous, multitudes are occu- d in content and gaiety. Amidst smoke and dark- ess, in the bowels of the earth and on the boisterous m, there is a more cheerful labour than in employ- s which appear more easy and agreeable. How nious is the cheerful heart in finding the means ijoyment and in extending these!

the other hand, when the spirit is broken the nes of a man's profession are a burden to him. In n does reason urge him to exertion, or affection ead with him to make his usual efforts, for he fan- cies himself incapable of doing any thing. To wan- der in solitary places, to sit alone and keep silence, or to stretch himself on the couch which he waters with tears, are the modes in which he spends the time which before was devoted to the healthful and joyous toils of industry. Reproach will not rouse him from a state which ignorance or malignity may deem the lethargy of indolence, but which is in fact a confinement in the chains of darkness, a subjection to the overwhelming power of despair.

5. Consider their influence on the connexions of life. The man of a merry heart is the happiness of his family and friends; while with them he spreads joy through his dwelling; every thing said or done he receives in the most favourable sense of which it is susceptible; and at ease himself, he labours to make others so. If such a man is in company with others,

the mild and benevolent pleasantry of his manners makes him the delight of those with whom he associates. The cheerful old man is regarded with confidence and love by little children; and the young have been seen vying with each other who should do quickest and best for him the little ministrations which his situation required. When strangers visit the family, what a pleasant old man! is the exclamation which the heart dictates; and his efforts to make them happy are received with peculiar relish, and to them a peculiar value is attached.

How different is the case with the broken spirit! The indications of joy in his presence such a man is apt to regard as an insult to his wretchedness. His family sit around him in tears; and even those of them too young to understand his situation, find their vivacity damped by the gloom of sorrow, and their caresses rejected by the sullenness of despair. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is put to silence in his dwelling, his harp is turned to mourning, and his organ to the voice of them that weep. Friendship, which suffers long and is kind, may admit of his presence, but it is such a dead weight on festive enjoyment, that he must at last be left to himself. Cheerfulness is like the bird whose melody, rich and sweet, enlivens a dwelling; but the gloomy and the surly are like the lion growling in his den. The cheerful parent is the darling of his family, and their life is bound up in his; but as for the man of an opposite spirit, nought but the sense of duty and the power of natural affection can keep them from regarding him as its burden. The attentions which he

receives are marred by anxiety and terror, while to the cheerful parent every duty is a pleasure, done with affection's sweetest grace, and received with its best welcome.

III. Let me now point out the means which should be employed, in dependence on the Divine blessing, for securing a cheerful old age.

To attain this happiness various things are necessary previous to our arrival at that state. It is necessary that we possess an interest in Christ and acceptance in the sight of God; for miserable must that old age be which places us on the brink of eternity, while we feel that we are utterly unprepared for it; and most unhappy is he who hath the lessons of religion to learn with an enfeebled mind, and its services to practise amidst all the difficulties of opposing habits. It is necessary, too, that we guard against sin; for intolerable are the horrors which remorse spreads around the old man, when he must say,—"Thou writest bitter things against me, and causest me to possess the iniquities of my youth."* How unhappy is the old age which is embittered by such reflections as these:—"I have injured my fellow-creatures, and I can now make them no compensation; I have dishonoured God, and I can now do nought for his glory!"

It is necessary, too, that we cultivate friendships with the young; for if this is not done, we shall be left in old age, by the removal of former associates,

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6.

in all the gloom of solitude. The kindness of persons of mature years gratifies the young, and their hearts are easily attached.

We should cultivate a disposition to be easily pleased. That sourness and fastidiousness which will be satisfied with nothing which is not marked by superior excellence, is a most unhappy temper for the individual in whom it works. In such a scene as this world is, his moments of enjoyment must be rare; and with more good nature and more good sense, gratification would be felt when no emotion is excited but disgust. This temper gathers strength as men advance in years, and the man who has grown old with it will find all around him bleak and desolate.

I may add, that, in order to have old age cheerful, it is highly necessary that provision be made for our comfortable support at that season. Painful are the anxieties and bitter are the feelings of poverty and dependence in old age; but very different is his situation who can procure, by the results of his industry, all the comforts which his infirmities require, and who has it in his power to give aid to the needy beside him. There have been instances in which the provision which was made for old age has been lost through misfortune, or the bad conduct of those to whom it was committed; but these are not of frequent occurrence: and when they do take place, such persons are considered in a very different light, amidst their necessities in advanced life, from those who, in vanity and sensuality, spent what they might have saved.

But something is requisite on the part [illegible] d
order to this cheerfulness; such as

Devotion.—The idea of the presence of God as a friend and father completely precludes the depressing sense of loneliness; and easily may he bear all that is disagreeable in the conversation of his fellow-creatures who can delight himself in God. The exercises of religion are so far from producing gloom and fretfulness, that they exhilarate the mind of the holy worshipper. The pious old man comes forth from the closet of prayer, with a face shining with benignity and gladness; and I may add on this part of the subject, that the views which devotion gives of Providence, of its wisdom and goodness in all its procedure, are admirably fitted to repress every feeling of dissatisfaction about the arrangements of our lot; and the conviction, "God doth all things well," cannot be felt without something more rapturous than tranquillity. Walking in the light of God's countenance and rejoicing in his name all the day, are the promised attainments of the pure in heart.

Benevolence.—This principle not only keeps the old man free from all the inquietude which arises from envy and malignity, but yields him all the delight which the happiness of others can afford him. From what he hath seen of life in the course of his long experience, he feels assured that there is much enjoyment around him, and that the earth is full of God's mercy. Now, the idea that others are happy is cheering to a benevolent man amidst all his own difficulties. Instead of complaining of my own infirmities, I will rejoice in hearing from others the melody of joy and health; instead of repining at the neglect which I experi e that others are

honoured; and instead of fretting that I must soon leave the world, I will rejoice in the bright hopes with which the young are entering on it, and pray that they may be realized in utility and enjoyment more extensive and ample than mine have been. Figure to yourselves an old man viewing with delight children at their sports. Instead of complaining of their restlessness and noise, he is charmed wi h their gaiety; he recalls the earliest and the sweetest of his days, and seems to feel the vivacity of his youth kindling within him.

Contentment.—This principle teaches a man to view with complacency and satisfaction objects and scenes which to others appear to call for nothing but repining, and instead of fretting that so little remains with him of the materials of enjoyment, he is astonished that God hath left so much. If one sense fails, he is grateful that this is not the case with all the rest. If some friends are gone, he is thankful that others remain; and if excluded from one ordinance, he blesses God that to some of the means of grace he still hath access. If one disease afflicts him with pain, he is grateful that he hath not a complication of maladies to struggle with. Contentment finds some verdure in the winter of life, and a sweet stillness in the evening twilight.

I add, as the last requisite to a cheerful old age,

Hope.—Instead of dark forebodings of evil to come, this hope assures the good man that he shall never be left helpless or forlorn. However little there may be in his worldly situation to encourage his expectations, his hope rests on the promise of him who is God

cient, and whose truth endureth to all genera-
; and with regard to another world, he sees his
hopes on the point of being realized: the Lord is
and, the heavens are opening, and the voice of
eloved is heard. The sacred writers speak in va-
s places of rejoicing in hope; and beautiful is the
nce betwixt these two gifts of Heaven,—"ever-
g consolation and good hope through grace,"
h the apostle joins together in his prayer. Con-
on animates hope, and hope increases consola-
Hope hath power to quicken the languid facul-
o brighten the dim eye, to strengthen the failing
t. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness.

CONCLUSION.

How strongly does the broken spirit claim our pity and our prayers! It is impossible to conceive on this side the grave a condition more dreary. In other situations of distress we have the hope of a favourable crisis in a few days, or at least we know that a very short time will either bring with it death or a cure; but who can tell when the broken spirit will be healed, and what periods of sorrow are appointed to it? To those whom Providence hath called to minister to such, I would say, God intends by this painful service to cherish in you the best fruits of his Spirit—patience, sympathy, and love, and to confer on you the highest honour of which you are capable,—that of being a fellow-worker with him in that office in which he takes a peculiar interest,—"the comforting of them that are cast down." Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

All severity is now discarded from the treatment of those who are insane; and in every species of mental disorder, it is not merely useless but hurtful. It aggravates the malady, and manifests a cruelty which no consideration can justify. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad."*

2. Let us carefully guard against the first symptoms of despondence in ourselves and in others. The first symptom which makes its appearance of a malady dangerous to the body, excites fear, and we are eager, by every suitable application, to repel the disease that is advancing; and shall we not combat a disorder more frightful and dangerous? Let us seek out those remedies which the Gospel contains for raising the bowed down: let us view events on their bright as well as on their dark side; let us cultivate the society of those who are walking in the light of the Lord; let us be diligent in our calling, and let us pray without ceasing. The singing of psalms is not only a fit expression of cheerfulness, but an excellent means to produce it, and to chase away the evil spirit. He will not make that place his haunt where this joyful sound is heard. Amusement is an expedient much commended by worldly people; they say, that symptoms of despondence will be most effectually repressed by it; and many a one has been dragged to the theatre or the ball-room, who could only sigh over its giddiness and folly, and who felt his gloom aggravated by the laugh of the scorner. At the same

* Prov. xii. 25.

it must be stated, that active employment, cheer-
ociety, the fresh breath of heaven, and the sight
ature in its beauty, are excellent expedients for
aining or restoring a healthful state of mind and

Let me give a few exhortations to the aged.
e of you are complaining that your old age is
rless; but remember, that this is to be imputed to
own carelessness and folly. You thought old
ould never come, and you made no preparation.
caution made no suitable impression on you,—
man live many years, and rejoice in them all,
m remember the days of darkness, for they shall
many."[a] You are now feeling the anguish of the
ten spirit, and are saying in the bitterness of your
s, "I feel the worm gnawing that shall never
, and the fire kindling that shall never be quenched."
But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of
righteousness arise with healing in his wings. Deem
not the number or the severity of your ailments a rea-
son for despondence, but let your exercise be that of
the primitive Christians, so beautifully described by
the Apostle Peter,—"In the gospel salvation ye
greatly rejoice, though now for a season (if need be)
ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations;
that the trial of your faith, being much more pre-
cious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried
with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour,
and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom
having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye

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[a] Eccl. xi. 8.

see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."*

4. Let the cheerful in heart be exhorted to be grateful to God who is their joy. It was he that turned for you your mourning into dancing, who put off your sackcloth, and girded you with gladness. Had it not been for him you might still have been sitting in ashes, and the spirit of bondage might have been stirring up distracting terrors within you. See that you console others with the same comforts wherewith you are comforted of God. This was one end of your being made so happy; and the richer your stores of consolation are, the more diligent should you be in solacing the feeble mind. You will find in this dispensation that it is as blessed to give as to receive. Grieve not the generous Saviour who hath blessed you, and who taketh pleasure in the prosperity of his servants. Cultivate an increasing acquaintance with those statutes of the Lord which rejoice the mind; with prayer which relieves the heart; and with those fruits of righteousness which are sown and reaped in peace. Let your cheerfulness be kept pure from every tincture of carnal and foolish mirth; and show that the more happiness you feel, the stronger is the impulse within you to active goodness, and to the crucifixion of the flesh.

Finally, Let me address those who are themselves in a false mirth. I know not the despairing mourner or the jovial sinn greatest object of pity. The jovial sinner's

* 1 Peter i. 6—8.

like the laughter of the maniac, or like the singing of the patient whose brain a fever hath disordered. The broken spirit may lead to that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation, but the audacious mirth of the sinner is most likely to end in weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. In hell sorrow crushes and remorse tortures the heart; and yet the power of an avenging God sustains it, that it may suffer for ever the misery which it chose, and the wrath from which it would not flee. Be afflicted then, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to sorrow, and your mirth to heaviness. It is thus only that you will feel the need of the Balm of Gilead, and thirst for the water of religious comfort. Come unto me, saith the blessed Jesus, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, toiling in the vain pursuit of happiness, or crushed under the load of guilty fears; come unto me and I will give you rest.* He will say to you, as you approach him in fear and trembling, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;" and this will be the sentence with which he will raise you from the dust, and send you away to walk in newness of life, and to rejoice in his mercy for ever. "Thy sins are forgiven thee; thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."†

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* Matt. xi. 28. † Luke vii. 48. 50.

DISCOURSE X.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES DEPLORED.

JEREMIAH viii. 20. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*

IN this chapter the Prophet describes, in a most powerful and striking manner, the miseries of the Jews, during the siege of their capital by the Chaldeans, and the horrors brought upon his unhappy country by its fall. In the text the people are represented as stating the vain hopes which they had entertained of deliverance. Day after day they had expected some friendly power to appear for their rescue, or some interposition of Heaven in their favour, but no relief had come. Their hearts were now sick through hope deferred, and disappointed, and they saw nothing now before them but captivity or death.

Though the prophet felt the strongest abhorrence of the crimes of his nation, and though he saw that the calamities which had befallen them were the due reward of their deeds, and the fulfilment of the threatenings which he had denounced against them, he deplored, with the bitterest sorrow a patriot can feel, the ruin of his country. It was not in exultation over its fall, but in deep regret, that he poured forth these strains. He had another object in view in doing so, which was worthy of his character as a prophet of the Most High; and it was this,—to warn

other nations against the sins which had brought Judah so low, and to make that people, who should have been a pattern of piety and obedience to the world, a solemn admonition to it in their fall.

These words may be considered as a fit representation of the feelings of persons in advanced life, whose minds and consciences are awakened to just views of their situation, and to bitter regret for the opportunities of salvation which they have lost through their own presumption and folly. In this light I propose to consider them; and the illustration of this topic may be useful as an admonition to the young, and as a counsel to the aged, who are feeling the anguish of shame and contrition.

In the following discourse I shall call your attention to the import of the lamentation, and then to the circumstances which, in the case of the aged sinner, give to it peculiar bitterness.

I. Let us then consider what is the import of the lamentation.

1. It implies a full conviction that those who use it are not in a state of salvation. There are many who in age, as well as at other periods of life, flatter themselves with the vain conceit that they are at peace with God. In some of them the opinion arises from the supposed blamelessness or utility of their lives; in others, from the recollection of some vivid impressions which they once felt of divine things; and in others from the peculiar kindness which God hath showed them in the course of his providence. To every representation of their guilt and danger they

oppose these delusive ideas, and cry peace, peace, when there is no peace.

But the awakened sinner is conscious that he is an utter stranger to the feelings and to the hopes of the saved. His coldness of heart shows him that he is an entire stranger to pious sensibility, his horrors to peace of conscience, and his proneness to evil to repentance unto life. He may be regarded by his friends as a man of the most estimable qualities. The world may look on him as one of the pillars of society, and the church may rank him with the saints and faithful in Christ; but his own conscience tells him, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." He feels that this is the estimate formed of him by the God who searches all hearts, and who understands all the imaginations of the thoughts, "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." The anguish of the man who has been guilty of rebellion against his sovereign, and who, instead of the success which he had expected, finds himself and his associates the objects of public abhorrence and of condign punishment, and who sees not his name included among those in whose favour a pardon has been granted, is an emblem of his distress who feels that he is condemned before God, and that the wrath of God abideth on him. Once the aged sinner imagined his state was safe, that he was rich and increased with goods, and stood in need of nothing; yet now he sees that he is poor and miserable, wretched, blind, and naked. How immaterial does it seem to him in such a state of mind what

in a worldly point of view,—that he has esta-
ed an extensive and flourishing business,—that
as formed respectable connexions,—acquired con-
le wealth, or attained great eminence in learn-
the sad reflection, I am not saved, makes him
it, in the bitterness of his spirit, "Yet all this
th me nothing." Salvation could have blessed
vithout them, but they cannot bless me without it.
It implies the recollection of the various oppor-
s of salvation with which they have been fa-
nd their regret for the loss of these. Youth
ost favourable season for religious impressions.
eart is soft and tender, and the melting scenes
rist's history and grace strongly interest it. The
is not yet engrossed by the cares of the world,
nder the charge of pious parents their lessons dis-
n them as the dew; yet the aged sinner has to re-
nect that its precious hours were wasted in trifles,—
that its noble energies were devoted to folly,—and
that it has left behind it no trace on which the heart
can rest. Had I been wise, do they say, its sprightliness would have been improved by religious joy, and its gracefulness heightened by its holy beauties. Oh! that I had devoted my youth to the love of the Redeemer, and to the cultivation of those acquirements which might have qualified me for advancing his cause; that my heart had been captivated by the excellencies of his character; and that I had followed the guidance of his word: then would I now have had it to say, My youth is gone, but it is not lost; and thus would the Almighty have addressed me:—"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the

love of thine espousals." But, alas! I have devoted the best season to the worst purposes; and my bones, full of the sins of my youth, remind me, that, to the indulgence of a moment, I have sacrificed my happiness. Loathsome insects rioting on the blossoms of the tree are an emblem of the blasting influences of the vices of youth.

What a different scene would the succeeding stages of life have exhibited to him had youth been devoted to piety! Religion would have sanctified his connexions and directed his pursuits; but the evil principles and practices of an undisciplined youth lead to their wider and more audacious operations amidst the various scenes of active life.

There are various events in life which are peculiarly adapted to impress us with serious ideas: such as the illness and death of relatives. A pious father or mother sinking into the grave, supported by religious comfort, and manifesting the faith and patience of the saints, is a most affecting sight. It is fitted to convince the careless of the necessity of religion, and of the happiness which it yields, and to make them say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." A wicked parent, dying in anguish and terror, is powerfully adapted to strike the heart with dismay, and to make us shun the course of those who live without God and without hope in the world; yet there are aged persons who must lament that they derived no lasting benefit from such scenes. I was agitated and afflicted for a little, but, ah! with what haste did I flee from the power of sorrow and drown my reflections in the gaieties of the

h! And some have had to lament, that from ue of the deathbed, and from the mouth of the , their heart went after its covetousness.

re are aged persons who feel that this is no pic- f the fancy, and who can say that they have of- secret bemoaned themselves thus:—"The first I ever saw was that of my sister, my companion y early sports, my associate at school, the confi- of ny griefs and joys; whose gentle voice l r ry passions, and whose meek wisdom ea many a folly. I saw her sinking u full of faith and joy, solacing her pa- with words of peace; and while she held my in hers, her last counsels were those of earnest aty to me to devote my heart and life to the love service of her Redeemer. I promised that I uid; and my sobs and tears seemed a pledge of my sincerity; but, ah! these vows were forgotten, and her piety, which should have animated me to goodness, cannot now rise before me but to fill me with shame."

The season of personal affliction has often been useful. The heart, sickening at worldly follies, and feeling the powers of the world to come, seems on the point of entering into the kingdom of God; yet doth it in some cases pass away, bearing with it every serious thought and purpose. And many aged sinners have lamented, that on the bed of languishing their whole attention was engrossed by the body; that, amidst the anxieties which they indulged about their worldly affairs, the interests of their souls were utterly neglected; that their wearisome hours were

spent in fretting against God; and that they came forth from the chamber of disease such in temper and conduct as sadly to exemplify these words of the Prophet, "Thou hast smitten them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction."*

The dispensation of religious ordinances presents many favourable opportunities for salvation. How admirably are the different scenes on the Sabbath adapted to form the heart to piety and to wisdom! The devotions of the sanctuary, the lessons of the pulpit, and the rest and quietness of our dwellings, are all fitted for this great object; yet the aged sinner has reason to reflect, that public worship was neglected by him on that day; that the hours he should have occupied in it were spent in secular business or in excursions for amusement; and that when he came to the house of God, it was with a mind preoccupied with worldly cares, and a heart disinclined to spiritual religion. How many of them may lament that the pious lessons of a father's house on a Sabbath evening passed away without their knowing the God of their fathers or learning to serve him; and that the services of domestic instruction, so favourable to the piety both of parents and of children, have been omitted on the most frivolous pretexts, or performed as a tiresome drudgery!

Sacramental solemnities bring with them many advantages for salvation. The topics discussed are of

* Jer. v. 3.

eepest interest, and the objects presented are solemn; yet the aged sinner must reflect, that seasons were often selected by him as the period ome journey of business or pleasure; and that they could not be thus occupied, and when a d to reputation demanded his outward respect em, he felt no solicitude about offering to God ual worship; and that most earnestly did he that these holy days were over, that he might worldly business without interruption. I saw levoting themselves to the Lord; but I said in eart, Who is the Lord that I should serve him, what profit shall I have if I pray to him? At I was struck with awe or melted into sorrow; ned with attention to the eloquence of devotion; s pleased with the novelty and the variety of the achers; but I remained a stranger to the sanctification of the Spirit, and to the belief of the truth; and these servants of the Most High God, who show to us the way of salvation, must witness at the tribunal of God against my unbelief and impenitence. Not a summer can I recall, but it sets before me the various opportunities which I had of going with the multitude to the house of God; and, ah! how many days of salvation have been lost to me! Had I lost as many opportunities of bettering my fortune, how would I have condemned my folly! But these were opportunities of acquiring a portion with which the whole world is not fit to be compared. Had I profited by these means of grace, what wisdom, life, and peace, would I have obtained! But they are gone,

and I am yet in my sins. Of all these means of grace I must say, that a price has been put into the hand of a fool to get wisdom to which he hath no heart.

I might add, that there are seasons in which the Spirit strives with men; in which the mind is struck with the excellence of divine things; in which religion appears with such beauty and sweetness, that the heart is made to burn; and in which heaven and hell seem to be opening before us. This is indeed a most propitious moment; and were such impressions cherished, we might have our fruit unto that holiness the end of which is everlasting life. On such moments the aged sinner has to look back, and his heart smites him at the remembrance of the manner in which he resisted the Holy Ghost, and sought to repress his movements by yielding to the influence of every evil suggestion. The beauty of religion was forgotten amidst the vain show of the world, and its joys amidst the revelry of the house of mirth; the heart in which the Spirit of God seemed to be taking up his abode, became more influenced than ever by the spirit of the world; the breeze and tide which bade fair to loosen the vessel from the sands on which it had struck both fell, and left it as firmly fixed as ever; the waves lashed along its sides, and the wind rattled among its shrouds, but none of them moved it from its place. Thus it is with many who seemed escaping from the pollutions of the world, who yet return to their former indulgences, and have their latter end worse than their beginning. How pathetically does God lament the waywardness of the sinner!

"O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had known my ways!"*

God's spirit will not always strive with man; and there are many with whom he once struggled, but whom he now leaves to follow sin without one effort to retard them, or to turn them to righteousness. As to them that awful mandate hath been given,—"Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."

3. The lamentation implies a conviction of their folly and guilt in suffering those opportunities to pass away unimproved. The sinner is now sensible of the value of these seasons. The summer is gone in which he might have sown to the Spirit, the harvest is ended in which he might of the Spirit have reaped life everlasting. The value of these seasons is never seen by many till they are over. The old man, whose heart is cold and dull, and who has no might for any effort, thinks with a sigh on the days of his youth, when every feeling was strong and lively, and when no difficulties discouraged him. The man who is held by the cords of his sins, and whom vicious habits have so enslaved that he cannot relinquish evil indulgences, even though he sees them to be sources of misery, sighs when he thinks of the days of his visitation, and of the fair prospect which he then had of being called to holiness and peace. The value of these neglected seasons shall not be always unregarded; it will one day be seen by eyes now most blind, and felt by hearts now most regardless. Oh! how the value of

* Psalm lxxxi. 13.

time is felt when we are near the brink of eternity, and of the day of life when that night is spreading its shadow in which no man can work.

It is not in youth that persons are generally impressed with the idea that it is a favourable season for working out their salvation; nay, they are ready to suppose that advanced life is the fittest period for sober reflection, and entire devotedness to piety and to wisdom. Neither is it on a sick-bed that men are impressed with its advantages for repentance; they imagine that this will be best exercised when freedom from suffering leaves body and mind at rest; but the folly of such views is seen afterwards, and the heart is wrung by the thought, that such seasons were not occupied as their duty and interest required. The aged sinner confesses that he was as inattentive to these seasons as if he had supposed he had no heaven to prepare for, and no soul to be saved. The language of the text seems to be that of remorse. I was careful to improve the season for restoring or maintaining the health of my body, and every favourable opening for the acquisition of riches or fame; yet, when my soul might have been made to prosper, and my name been written among the living in Jerusalem, "I cared for none of these things."

The sinner uttering the lamentation in the text is like one who has gone to a rock far within the course of the sea. In vain is he reminded before he goes, that the way to it is open only while the tide has retired, and that when it swells, the rock and the surrounding sand will be covered. He despises these cautions, and amuses himself on the rock till the ga-

thering of the waters forces him to remain and to perish; he then condemns the objects which absorbed his attention, the security which made him deaf to warning, and the presumption which rendered him insensible to the voice of passing time, and to the advance of the devouring sea.

4. There is in this lamentation a dreadful apprehension of utter perdition. I am not saved, and never may, is the fear which the expression suggests. It is to a state such as this that the language of the Apostle may be applied, "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."* In such a state of mind the perdition, which seemed before but a gloomy vision, appears now a frightful reality. Of others it shall be said, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" But to such a man's character and fate these words apply,—"He that being often reproved, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."† The blessed on high shall sing of everlasting mercy, but he must howl under the vengeance of eternal fire.

The man who is not enriched may have a competence, and he who is not exalted may occupy a place of some respectability; but if this phrase, "not saved," remains applicable to any one till death, he must perish for ever. It is not amidst the allurements of worldly pleasure, or the engagements of worldly business, that men think much on the wrath to come,

* Heb. x. 26, 27. † Prov. xxix. 1.

or the miseries of a future state. If they are pressed on their attention, there is a sophistry which easily satisfies them that they have little to apprehend from the displeasure of God, or that they will have sufficient opportunities hereafter to appease him; but, amidst the retirement and seclusion of advanced life, the sinner feels that his ruin is certain, near, and terrible. This is his conclusion,—"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" My place cannot be with the wheat, which he will gather into his garner, but with the chaff, which he will burn with fire unquenchable. I am now, and I have been useless and vile as it is. My doom is merited, and it cannot be too dreadful for my deserts.

With regard to persons in early life, the idea is entertained by many, that the offences of that period are so few and so trivial, that God will not be severe in punishing them; but with whatever force this may be maintained by those who have low conceits of the purity of the Divine character, and light thoughts of the evil of sin, the most presumptuous will scarcely admit that the aged transgressor can be soothed by such sophistry. If his conscience is enlightened it will repel it with abhorrence, and he will acknowledge that he is worthy of the sorest punishment, and that he hath destroyed himself.

II. Let me now state the circumstances which, in the case of the aged sinner, give to this lamentation peculiar bitterness.

1. The length of time during which he has enjoyed

these opportunities. Had there been but one offer of mercy, the disregard of it would have been felt as highly criminal; but most aggravated is the guilt and inexcusable the folly of rejecting offers of mercy without number. If there had been but one day of salvation, the neglect of it would have been a display of gross ingratitude and stupidity; but when we think how for years, yea, scores of years, God has waited to be gracious, wonder at his patience is mingled with astonishment at the sinner's infatuation. These texts strike the aged sinner as a just picture of his own character:—"All day long have I stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that were sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children to me, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not! Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God calleth thee to repentance, but after thy hardness and impenitence of heart treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"* For a long life doth he say, I have been disobedient to the most solemn mandates, and resisted the most affectionate entreaties. What method could be employed to awe, or what strains to melt, which have not been used with me in vain? In the obstinate wickedness and ingratitude of Israel, I see a picture of my own; and, alas! while I

* Matt. xxiii. 37. Rom. ii. 4, 5. and x. 21.

fancied that I was making provision for a comfortable age, I have been fitting myself as a vessel of wrath for destruction.

It is mentioned in the history of our Lord, that when he came to the pool of Bethesda, a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years; and when Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" but that man's imbecility was his misfortune, not his crime; and the beautiful view which it gives of the Saviour's compassion appears to the awakened conscience to yield no hope to him who has lived for scores of years in wilful sin.

2. The idea that others have been saved under these opportunities aggravates this regret. He calls to remembrance the young who remembered their Creator in the days of their youth, and laments that the kindness of his youth was devoted to objects which he ought to have abhorred and shunned; and the sick, who rose from beds of distress, to show, by their wisdom and sobriety, that the discipline of affliction had reclaimed them completely from folly, while he returned "like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." He calls to mind those who wisely cherished the motions of the Holy Ghost, and in whom good impressions were matured into a complete change of heart and character while he resisted and quenched the Spirit. He thinks of those who, by the ordinances of the Gospel, were made wise to salvation, and filled with the fruits of the Spirit, while he must mourn at the

but when his flesh and his body are consumed, and say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly."*

There are circumstances which heighten this anguish, as when these means have been effectual to those who have had them for a shorter period, and in situations less advantageous than theirs. The benevolence which leads persons to rejoice in the happiness of others under their own misfortunes, can scarcely be supposed to operate in the case of those who see themselves children of wrath, while others are called to glory and virtue. In the parable of the talents we are informed, that, after a long time, the lord of the servants came and reckoned with them; and while the time in which the slothful servant had suffered his talent to lie unimproved aggravated his guilt, bitter would his shame and anguish be when he contrasted his indolence with the activity of the other two, and his punishment with the approbation and advancement of which they were the objects.

3. Despair of their renewal. With regard to the season of youth, it is as impossible to restore its simplicity, its docility, its pliableness, its ardent feeling, its detachment from engrossing cares, as it is to bring back its fresh bloom to the wrinkled face of age, and its brisk movements to its palsied limbs.

And with regard to other seasons of mercy, we

* Prov. v. 12—14.

have reason to think that God will not still vouchsafe them to those who, after his long patience with them, remain foolish and disobedient. He will not give back such opportunities to be again trampled on and abused. The word of God assures us, that his patience with the sinner hath its limits, and that when these are come, no entreaties nor efforts can obtain a farther extension. The time shall come in which men shall desire to see days of the Son of Man, but shall not see them. It was this idea which made our Lord say to the Jews, "Yet a little while is the light with you: walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."* It was this idea that made the heart of the Saviour himself melt. He beheld Jerusalem, and wept over it, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now are they hid from thine eyes."† He then predicts her speedy and utter desolation, because she knew not the time of her visitation. Besides, death is at hand, and it will take us from all the means of grace. The summer may appear in its glory, but it will not be to us. The harvest may put forth its golden treasures, but it will be for others. The multitude that keep holiday will tread on our graves; and around the place where we moulder the joyful sound may be proclaimed for ages, yet still it

* John xii. 35, 36. † Luke xix. 42.

is the house of silence, the place of the desolations of many generations.

I may add, that such aged sinners have much reason to fear, that though they are spared, God may give this commandment concerning them: "Make the heart of this people fat, and their eyes dim, and their ears heavy, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them." To expect salvation amidst the stupidity of such a state, is like looking for genial warmth and luxuriant vegetation amidst the winter's frost and snow.

CONCLUSION.

1. Let the young be admonished by this text. It is certain that few of you will live to that advanced period at which I have viewed this complaint as made. For you the summer of life may never blossom; and many of you are destined to pass away as the flowers of its spring. But though you should become old, yet mark what bitter regrets you are preparing for yourselves. Every day of carelessness at present, every deed of folly now, will be remembered then to afflict the heart, and to wring it with bitter regrets at a time when it peculiarly requires support and consolation. On the other hand, by now applying your hearts to wisdom, you will, if you become old, be soothed by the most gratifying testimony of a good conscience, that you feared the Lord from your youth. Amidst all the gloom, and chilness, and dreariness of the falling year, you will be solaced by

the thought of the activity of its spring, the beauty of its summer, and the produce of its harvest. In the days of darkness you will be able to say with Hezekiah, in gratitude for the grace by which you are what you are, and in hope in that mercy which will not forget your work and labour of love,—"Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight."* Then you will not have to reflect on the young whom you corrupted by your youthful profligacy, or emboldened by your audacity in sin; but you will remember, with praise to God, that you were enabled to set an example of good conduct, and to show the blessedness of fearing the Lord betimes.

2. Let me address some exhortations to those who are in the situation which I have been describing. Your state is indeed awful, but do not conceive it to be desperate. Such an idea as this has led to acts at which the heart shudders. They said there is no hope; and we will walk, every one after his own devices, and do according to the imaginations of his own heart. Among the black records of suicide, not a few are to be found who, conceiving their damnation sealed, have rushed out of the world, that their misery might not be aggravated by a longer life in sin. In vain has religion allured, and the merciful with tears besought such persons to hope; despair crushes the heart. Oh! sin not against the Saviour's power and grace by despair! The Redeemer still stands at

* Isaiah xxxviii. 3.

the door and knocks. The third, and sixth, and ninth hours are over, yet the eleventh hath not yet run its course; but remember, that few and fleeting are its minutes, and that at its close the angel shall lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that as to you there shall be time no longer. In what a different spirit will the lamentation in the text be made in hell! Final despair will add to the words, "I am not saved,"—never shall I be saved, never can I be saved! Seek ye the Lord, then, while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. As the snow on the hills, the leaves strewn on the ground, the chill blasts, the fading verdure of the fields, and the lessening splendour of the sky, intimate that the winter is at hand; so your infirmities, and forebodings, and the deaths of your acquaintances, tell you that the time of your departure is nigh. Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel; and if you would meet him in peace, pray to him without ceasing, "Lord, save us, we perish."

3. Let true Christians be thankful to Him who hath made them to differ. Instead of the lamentation in the text, this is your joyful song, "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, and he also is become my salvation."* Bless him who taught you to redeem the time; for had you been left to yourselves, you would have lived in thoughtlessness and folly, and not even the most striking dispensations would have taught you wisdom. But God in

* Isaiah xii. 2.

mercy taught you to think on your ways, and inclined you to turn your feet to his testimonies, and you made haste and delayed not to keep his commandments. Pity the wretched sinner described in the text, and pray that he may obtain mercy. Many of the complaints of the aged are disregarded as resulting from a fretful humour, and others are laughed at as the consequence of dotage; but this lamentation exhibits misery not only real but frightful.

Seek that God may maintain in you as strong a persuasion of salvation as the sinner hath of his want of it. Say to my soul, "I am thy salvation." Pray that your hope may be as potent as their despair, your confidence as their terror. Cast not away your confidence and rejoicing of hope, which hath so great a recompense of reward. Diligently improve all opportunities for furthering your salvation. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand. Let not one hour of the summer's sun shine, nor one breeze of the harvest wind blow unimproved by you. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."*

Finally, Let me call on the aged, who feel no regret at the loss of religious opportunities, to consider their ways and to be wise. It displays an infatuation truly shocking to look back without shame, or grief, or terror, upon an ill-spent life, and the obstinate disregard of the great salvation; nay, there have been persons in advanced life who have boasted of the ex-

* Psalm cxxvi. 6.

cesses of their youth, vindicated their habitual contempt of things sacred by the basest scoffs of infidel blasphemy, and ridiculed the idea of a future account as a superstitious restraint on all human enjoyment. You have not made the reflection in the text, but you must soon make it amidst utter despair. Yes, the fool who is too merry to be serious, the scoffer who laughs at all religious anxiety and care, and the presumptuous who say the summer has many days yet to run, and the harvest has many weeks yet to fulfil, shall find that the end of their mirth is heaviness; that they have been flattering themselves in their own eyes till their iniquity is found to be hateful; and that those who would not bend in penitence shall be crushed in judgment. Amidst the words of eternal life you are dying in your sins, and amidst the dispensation of the Spirit you are ending in the flesh. The time is at hand when God will say to you, "Because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."* Repent now, therefore, and believe the Gospel. It is high time to be serious. Delay not for one moment your flight from the wrath to come. Oh! that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end. Amen.

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* [illegible]—26.

DISCOURSE XI.

THE TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

MARK v. 18, 19. *And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not; but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

FOR this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. This was an object peculiarly suited to his character who is the Holy One and the Good; and in the accomplishment of it, his power and grace were displayed in a way most honourable to himself and most happy for human beings. In the prophecies of the Old Testament, many intimations were given that this should be the great object of his coming, and there were striking indications throughout the whole of his public life, that to this his plans and efforts were directed.

During Christ's appearance on earth, Satan was permitted to exercise a peculiar influence, not only over the souls, but over the bodies of men, that our Lord might, in expelling him, give a pledge of his final victory over all the powers of darkness. In this light were those miracles viewed by the more enlightened among his disciples, and in his own mind they awakened the joyful anticipations expressed in

se words,—"I beheld Satan fall like lightning m heaven."

n the occasion to which our text refers, two de- niacs were relieved by our Lord, but one only is iced by Mark, on account of the uncommon vio- ce of his malady. The case of this poor man ns to have been peculiarly afflictive. He was an ct of terror to all around, by his fierceness and ngth, his horrible cries, and the tortures which he ted on himself; but Jesus beheld him with pity, did great things for him; freed him from this ession of the devil, and formed a meek and pure t within him. There were miracles of Christ in ch the cure of the body was not accompanied with sanctifying operation on the soul. The nine ers who were cleansed still remained in that moral impurity which they never felt as an evil, and from which they expressed no wish to be freed; but this child of the devil was made a child of wisdom, and was translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. He formed in him a reverence for God, and a submission to his will, against whom he had poured out such hideous blasphemy, and implanted dispositions soft and kind in a heart which raged with malignant fury. It has been supposed that he was of Gentile extraction; and if this was the case, the Syrophenician woman and he were the only two heathens cured by our Lord, and were the pledges of that grace which is destined to heal the nations. There is another circumstance most interesting about him. He is an honourable exception to that aversion from Christ which was felt and ex-

pressed by all the inhabitants of that district; for while they were eager for his removal, the man was most desirous not to be separated from him, and was willing to forsake all and to follow him. Such was the spirit of his request to our Lord, to which an answer was given which is rich in instruction,—"Go home to thy friends, and show them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

In this discourse I shall call your attention to the motives which dictated this man's request; to the reasons which led our Lord to give this answer to it; and to the practical lessons we should derive from this incident.

I. Let us consider the reasons which led this man to this request.

1. He was led to this by fear. He was afraid that, in our Lord's absence, the devil might return and render him more vile and miserable than ever. There might have been seasons already in which devils ceased to molest him, but had come back with redoubled fury. He might have heard of cases of possession by devils, in which they retired for a while, and then returned in greater wrath than before. Our Lord alludes to this when he says,—"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my place from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and

y enter in and dwell there: and the last state of
ıt man is worse than the first."* I cannot but re-
ark here how solemn the warning is which these
ɔrds address to those who have relinquished for a
ason wicked practices to which they were addicted.
ıould they return again to these, they will become
ɔre audacious in vice than ever, and in all proba-
ity will live and die in utter profligacy.

The misery which this man had felt was fresh in
memory. He never could forget it; but for some
ıe after his cure, his impressions of it would be pe-
liarly vivid. Our feelings, after an unexpected de-
erance, are such, that we find it difficult to believe
reality; and often does the man, rescued from im-
inent peril or severe suffering, start from his slum-
er under the agonizing impression, that he is the
victim of misery; and it is not till after a period of
calm reflection that his mind reposes in the consciousness of safety. How watchful is the captive who has escaped from the lash of his tormentor! He will submit to any privation rather than put himself again in his power; but the worst slavery hath no horrors equal to the tormenting influence of the wicked one.

He might be afraid, too, lest the rude and irritated inhabitants of that district might take vengeance on him as the occasion of the loss they had suffered. It is common for wicked men to direct against the adherents of an enemy the insult and the oppression of which they cannot make him the object; and the very idea that he had experienced such favours from

* Matt. xii. 43—45.

one whose displeasure they had provoked, was calculated to exasperate a malignant heart against him. This fear he ought not to have cherished; for that power which he had so signally experienced was able to keep him in perfect peace; but we will not be surprised at it when we consider that his knowledge was as yet limited, and that his mind was still tremblingly alive to all the horrors of his past condition.

2. Love to Christ led him to this request. He had seen in the Saviour a condescension and a pity so amiable as had charmed his heart. From devils he had received the most tormenting abuse; his fellow-creatures looked on him with horror, and loaded him with fetters and chains the strongest they could procure; but Jesus had met him in mercy, and redeemed him from a misery which no created power could mitigate, far less remove. It was an impulse of the grace of our Lord which led him, when he saw Jesus afar off, to run and worship him; and now that the Lord had shown him such marvellous lovingkindness, he felt his whole heart cleaving to him. He had such a strong sense of our Lord's kindness, that he wished to be with him to seize every opportunity of testifying his gratitude. He would have accounted no service degrading to such a benefactor, and rather than stay away, he would have said, "Let me be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord."

How different was this holy affection from the unclean spirit by which he was before actuated! The devil had tormented him by the most abominable suggestions, and had laboured to make him as vile as he was wretched; but now he was taught to approve

things that are excellent, and the character of Je- appeared to him so marked by wisdom, sweetness, ver, and generosity, as to be in his estimation altoher lovely. He regarded him as the best friend had, and as his Saviour from the worst enemies from the lowest hell.

. He was led to this by dislike to the spirit and to manners of the Gadarenes. Their behaviour to Lord was most painful to him, and he felt reant to remain among a people where Jesus Christ been despised and rejected, and where his testies to his excellence and kindness would be red with indignation. He wished to mingle with se whose hearts were glowing with feelings like own. The affectionate heart cannot bear to assote with those from whom nothing can be heard out taunts and abuse of those it loves; but the praise which accords with its own esteem is most delightful. It was the influence of a malignant feeling to his species which made him, before his deliverance, prefer a dwelling among the tombs to a residence among his countrymen; but now he disliked their society from a higher principle,—there was not among them all one that was like minded with himself.

4. He was led to this request by a strong desire to receive more wisdom and grace from Jesus. He knew that wherever our Lord went he would reveal the mysteries of his kingdom to babes; and in these lessons of holy wisdom he was most eager to share,—to these words of eternal life he delighted to listen. Such was the grace and the power of our Lord's instructions, that even persons least likely to be touched

were charmed with his discourses, and said, "Never man spake like this man;" and if such was their effect on the officers of the council, it need not surprise us that this man, who had been thus blessed by the Lord Jesus, should open his ear for the gracious words which flowed from his lips. He wished also, by marking our Lord's temper and character, to advance further in holy attainments. Religious and moral excellence never strikes us so much in the most beautiful description, as it does when it is exhibited before us in living worth; and never was devotion seen in such pure fervour, patience in such mild endurance, charity in such varied kindness, or zeal in such meek and entire devotedness to God, as in the example of Jesus Christ.

He knew, too, that wherever our Lord went, he would dispense blessings to the miserable. Selfish persons, after receiving a favour, feel no solicitude about their benefactor's extending his notice to others; their only care is to engross it to themselves; but this man wished that others might be blessed as he had been, and that he might have the satisfaction of witnessing it. The most interesting object which could be presented before him was Jesus going about doing good, healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people, and triumphing in the removal of the wretchedness and the depravity of human beings.

II. We are ready to imagine that such a request should be readily granted. Jesus knew the motives by which it was dictated, and saw much in them to

his pprobation, yet he would not permit him
ecc ny him, but said to him, "Go home to
riends, and show them how great things the
hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on
." Let us consider the reasons for this injunction.
In this reply our Lord showed his sovereignty.
granted the request of the devils, and permitted
to enter into the herd of swine, though he knew
their object in it was, that by their destruction
excite such dislike in the Gadarenes to
ould induce them to act so as to provoke
eave them. He listened to the entreaty of
adarenes when they besought him to depart out
eir coasts, and thus gave an awful warning to
e who receive not the love of the truth that they
y be saved, and who labour to silence and to expel the faithful preachers of wisdom and righteousness, that they shall be left to wander undisturbed in their own counsels and delusions; but this request was not granted. And is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own? However mysterious his procedure may be, and whatever clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. We are certain that the refusal could not proceed from any dislike which he had to this object of his mercy. After the great salvation which he had wrought for him, he could not be reluctant to grant him any favour which he saw was adapted for his good. The reasons which led him to refuse the request were so satisfying to this man, that he did not urge it again, but went cheerfully home, as our Lord had desired him. Fierce and

untractable as he once was, he is now gentle and easy to be entreated. In this exercise of sovereignty there was much wisdom and mercy; for the quietness of his family was much better adapted to one whose mind had been so distracted, than the hurry and the bustle of public life. The retirement to which he sent him was not gloomy and hideous, like that of the cemetery or the desert in which he formerly lived, but a privacy sweetened by the kindness of rejoicing friends. How beautifully does our Lord's conduct in this instance accord with that view of his character! "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are but dust."

Besides, in his family he should experience such tokens of the Saviour's care as should satisfy him that Jesus was still mindful of him, and that though invisible, he was still with him in his grace and mercy.

2. The answer of our Lord shows the modesty of his own spirit. Had this man become one of his common attendants, his enemies, who were eager to avail themselves of every pretext to reproach him, would have accused him of vain glory. Ostentation was a fault with which the religionists of that day were peculiarly chargeable; for when the Pharisees gave alms they sounded a trumpet before them; when they fasted, they disfigured their faces that they might appear to men to fast; when they prayed, they stood in the corners of the streets; and by such conduct they exposed themselves to Christ's sharp rebuke. Now every thing which might be considered as indicating such a temper our Lord carefully avoided. His heart was broken by reproach, but public applause he

never courted. For the greater part of his life he lived in privacy, and when he was called to appear before the world in his public ministry, he did not cry, nor lift up, nor make his voice to be heard in the streets. The brightest displays of his glory were seen only by a chosen few; and if we examine his miracles we shall find in them the plainest indications that they were not wrought for human praise. "When he came to Bethsaida, they brought a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand,"—what amiable condescension!—"and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town."*

Thus, too, after he had raised the daughter of Jairus from death to life, he charged the parents strictly that no man should know it. However gratifying the detail might be to a parent's heart, he forbade them to tell the miracle he had wrought. And thus, too, when he had raised the young man of Nain from the bier, however fit he might have been, from his youth, activity, and amiable dispositions, for attending him as a disciple, yet, from dislike to the curiosity and the fame which his story would excite, and from regard

* Mark viii. 22—26.

to the comfort of his widowed mother, he delivered him to her, and bade him go home and make her happy. Have you, my young friends, an aged father sinking in infirmity, Christ delivers you to him, saying,—" Strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees." Or have you an aged mother lonely and helpless, Christ delivers you to her, and says,—" Show kindness to her as you would wish that I should show kindness to you." No reflections are so bitter in old age as those which you will make if a mother's tears have been disregarded, or if a father's frailties have been neglected or despised.

3. Our Lord gave this reply in kindness to this man's friends. They had suffered much from the calamity to which he had been subjected; in all this distress they had been the objects of Christ's pity, and he wished to give them comfort and to make this man the messenger of it. Instead of noise and fury, he was now to exhibit to them, the meekness and kindness of the spirit of love and of a sound mind; they had seen him distracted by demoniac frenzy, now they were to see him in possession of that holy peace which arises from Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith. How solacing is it to think, that, amidst the affliction which families have to bear, through the mental or bodily illness of any of their members, Jesus feels it! In all our affliction he is afflicted. The family of this man had no claim on our Lord's compassion, yet to them it was directed.

Christ delights to comfort families by those members of them through whom they have been afflicted. Have you suffered much through the pining sickness

of any in your family, he will comfort you in their vigorous health. Have you suffered through their dark despondence, he will comfort you in their perfect peace. Have you suffered through their fears and misgivings, he will comfort you in their cheerful hopes. Have you suffered through their folly or their stubbornness, he may comfort you by their prudence, gentleness, and deference.

But our Lord might intend to make this man the instrument of leading his friends to saving views of his work and character. The accounts which he had to give of Christ's power and compassion might win their affection to him, and might convince them, that, notwithstanding the judgment in which his deliverance had issued, he delighted in mercy. Others could easily supply to our Lord the services which this man wished to pay him, but none was so fit as he to enlighten and solace his dwelling. Every look which his friends gave to his countenance, now so calm and cheerful, would remind them of his wild and haggard aspect, and his whole deportment, so pure and so peaceable, was such a perfect contrast to his brutal fierceness, as could not but strike them with the might and mercy of his deliverer. Appeals to such experience could not be answered nor opposed. It was evident, too, that our Lord had no selfish views in the miracle, and in it, and in this result of it, all was kindness, and kindness to them. It was wrought, not to swell his attendants, but to send this man to bless his household. Mercy to one member of a family is an encouragement to all the rest. Christ wished this man to show to his friends what had been

done, that they too might apply to his grace, and hope in his mercy. He does not say when he has enlightened, or renewed, or blessed one member of a family, I have done enough for that house; but it is his wish that all in it may repair to the fountain of his grace, and may take the water of life freely. No favour could be too much for them to solicit after what he had done for this victim of the devil.

4. Christ gave this reply, to show the importance which he attaches to the offices of domestic piety. Many entertain very low ideas of their interest and importance; for there is no parade in them to gratify their vanity; but Jesus Christ values them highly on account of their sincerity. In the course which we pursue before the world, the idea of the inspection of our fellow-creatures may keep us from follies, and animate us to various acts of kindness, that we may escape their censure and gain their applause; but in our family no disguise can be worn, no imposition can be practised. The gentleness which blesses them is the temper of the heart; the zeal which labours there hath piety for its principle, and the sobriety, which there never yields to folly, is maintained by the fear of God.

Christ values these offices of domestic piety highly, because they are the spring which produces and maintains the various exercises of goodness in public life. It is the wisdom which is formed under the nurture and admonition of the Lord which shines like a light in the world; it is the self-denial which is taught by parental restraint which resists the allurements of pleasure; it is the devotion which is

kened in family-worship which sanctifies the sab-
, and acknowledges God in every thing; and it
e kindness which delights to make relatives hap-
which, in the public walks of life, distributes its
ities.

we examine our Lord's history, we will find that
as the exercise of goodness in domestic scenes
h called forth his warmest approbation. Of the
an who poured the precious ointment on his head,
sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper, he
—" Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached
ghout the whole world, this that she hath done
be spoken of for a memorial of her;"* and of
nturion who came to solicit his mercy for his
servant, and expressed his confidence in his power
eal him, he said,—" I have not found so great
, no, not in Israel."†

Let none then imagine, that the Saviour delights in the parade and bustle of religious display; and overlooks the piety and goodness which work in retirement. To him the father teaching his children what it is to fear the Lord,—the mother saying to the little ones she is bringing to Christ with all the persuasive sweetness of experience and affection, " O taste and see that God is good,"—the sister who, by the beauty of holiness, makes religion appear amiable to her brothers,—children solicitous for the salvation of thoughtless parents, and eager to lead servants to the knowledge and love of the Redeemer,—and the aged speaking to the young of the holy scenes of former years,

* Mark xiv. 9. † Matt. viii. 10.

which are still fresh in their memory, are most acceptable among his disciples, and shall be honoured by him before his Father, when the deeds which have been celebrated by acclamation, and commemorated by the united labours of art and of genius are disregarded.

III. Let me now point out the practical lessons to be learned from this scene.

1. It shows us how dear the presence of Christ is to those who have seen and felt his grace. The manifestations of his presence have not been to you so singular in their nature as they were to this man; yet you have seen his glory, you have received his benefits, such glory as hath filled you with holy admiration, and such benefits as claim your everlasting gratitude. You have felt a delight in his presence which you never experienced till you saw the Lord, and which has stimulated your zeal to worship and serve him. The presence of the Lord Jesus is the life of his people's graces, and the solace of their griefs. While he is with them they can bear separation from the dearest earthly friend, but in his absence they have neither strength, nor safety, nor comfort. The most painful intimation to the good is that of their Lord's departure, and were there nought but that expression, "Depart from me," in the doom of the wicked at the last day, it would seem to them intolerable misery.

This is a consideration which aggravates their grief at our Lord's departure, that our iniquities have separated betwixt us and our God, and have provoked

o hide his face from us. These seasons of dark-
by which life is embittered, are of your own pro-
. Let those who are mourning the absence of
Lord confess this in deep regret, and seek his
earnest entreaty, and with the strongest pur-
of amendment: and let those who enjoy his
nce walk humbly with their Saviour, and let
evince to all around them, that the ardour
communion with him produces is a holy ardour,
it it expands the heart in candour and benevo-

t will heaven be when your wish that you
with him shall be fulfilled in your being ever
Lord? Your prayer, that you may be with
nere he is so far from refusing, that he enforces
his own, "Father, I will that they whom thou
given me may be with me where I am."*

Let us submit readily to the will of our Lord in all his denials of our requests. Let us remember, that he doth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him what dost thou. Let us consider, that we have no claim on him for the least favour, nay that we deserve nought from him but tribulation and anguish. Say not he hath granted to others the favours which he hath denied to me, and is thine eye evil because his eye is good? Do you say he hath raised my neighbour to prosperity, and denied me the worldly success which I sought, but the advantages which they have obtained may be a

* John xvii. 24.

curse instead of a benefit, and he may have given you blessings of a higher order, and of a more beneficial tendency. You say he heard the prayers of a family beside me for the life of a profligate child, while I besought him in vain to spare a son most amiable and pleasant; and can you fret that he has kept the prodigal in the scene where he may yet be brought to repentance, and taken your child to the place for which his grace had thus early prepared him? You say that the expectations you cherished and expressed had been prompted by his kindness; but that kindness calls you to silence instead of warranting your murmurs. Be assured of it, that no good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly, and that when he denies you aught on which your hearts are set, it is because you are not prepared to receive or improve it as you ought, and because he intends to try your resignation and patience. There is not a good man but may remember many instances in his life in which he has seen how unwisely he had prayed, and that the denial of his requests, which he once thought a calamity, he hath found to be a blessing.

3. Let us reflect on the experience we have had of the power and compassion of Christ. Some have experienced it in the cure of raging madness, and none, who considers the degradation and wretchedness of such a state, and the desperate deeds to which it hath hurried, can question the propriety of Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment when his reason returned to him,—"Now I praise, and honour, and extol the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his

him to hide his face from us. These seasons of dark ness, by which life is embittered, are of your own pro curing. Let those who are mourning the absence o their Lord confess this in deep regret, and seek hi face in earnest entreaty, and with the strongest pur poses of amendment: and let those who enjoy hi presence walk humbly with their Saviour, and l them evince to all around them, that the ardo which communion with him produces is a holy ardou and that it expands the heart in candour and benev lence.

What will heaven be when your wish that y may be with him shall be fulfilled in your being ev with the Lord? Your prayer, that you may be wi him there he is so far from refusing, that he enforc it by his own, "Father, I will that they whom th hast given me may be with me where I am."*

2. Let us submit readily to the will of our Lord all his denials of our requests. Let us remember, th he doth according to his will in the army of heav and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none c stay his hand, or say unto him what dost thou. I us consider, that we have no claim on him for the le favour, nay that we deserve nought from him b tribulation and anguish. Say not he hath grant to others the favours which he hath denied to me, a is thine eye evil because his eye is good? Do y say he hath raised my neighbour to prosperity, a denied me the worldly success which I sought, b the advantages which they have obtained may be

* John xvii. 24.

ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."*

Others have experienced it in their deliverance from violent temptations, by which their minds were frightfully agitated. Let them say, "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, the snare is broken and we are escaped."

Others have experienced it in our Lord's quelling the rage of evil passions, which were hurrying them to crimes. They have felt anger giving place to meekness, revenge to charity, evil desire to contentment, and self-denial, and pride bent on oppression, to humility and mercy.

Others have felt it in their deliverance from despondency. They can say, "He took me from a fearful pit, and from the miry clay, and set my feet on a rock." Others have felt it in their deliverance from bodily pain, and they can say,—"Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee; for he hath delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."† And others have felt it in his delivering them from difficulties and embarrassments, which were marring their usefulness and threatening their domestic peace.

Aged Christians have often experienced his compassion and power in lightening their infirmities, and can attest, that in situations where men showed them the least pity, their Saviour's mercy was most apparent, and that, when they would do nothing for them,

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* Dan. iv. 37. † Ps. cxvi. 7, 8.

his grace was exceedingly abundant. The helpless are the objects of his peculiar care, and on the desolate he lifts the brightness of his countenance, O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me and delivered me from all my fears. Let us trust his compassion and power for the time to come. With him is everlasting strength, and his mercy endureth for ever. Never question, in any situation, that compassion and power which you have found so ready to save, and on which none ever reposed confidence in vain.

4. What noble subjects religion furnishes for domestic converse. You have not such remarkable interpositions of Heaven to speak of in your families as this man had, but you have, in the multitude of God's mercies, a theme always new and always pleasant. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing."*

Some will complain to their families of the unkindness of Providence, and will fret and murmur before them because they have not succeeded according to their expectations; others will detail, in the strongest language, the injuries done them by any of their fellow-creatures, and the purposes they have formed for retaliation and revenge; while others delight to talk before them of the notice taken of them by the great, the promises made to them, and the favours they have

* Ps. cvii. 21, 22.

conferred on them; like Haman, who, when he came home, sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife, and told them of the glory of his riches, and of the multitude of his children, and all things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Such subjects may gratify the vain and evil passions of our nature, but they degrade a man before his family, and form in them the worst impressions and habits. But to speak of the goodness of God gratifies the best feelings of the heart, elevates the tone, and enriches the seasons of domestic converse. He who hath most to say of God's goodness shall still have more.

5. How graciously the Lord Jesus adapts our sphere of labour to the state of the body and the mind! He judges for us in wisdom and tenderness, and will not suffer us to be tried above what we are able to bear. This remark may be most strikingly illustrated by his dealings with the aged. He calls you from fatigues under which your strength was sinking, from struggles for which your firmness was not adequate, and from cares with which your hearts were overcharged. He calls you to lie down beside the still waters, and, in the tranquil scenes of meditation, and prayer, and domestic converse, to spend your last days in peace. Fret not that he is now dooming you to obscurity, and that you must now live in indolence. He opens in the young, whom he gathers around you, a scene in which you may be far more useful than you have ever been.

Some aged persons make themselves ridiculous by

their vanity, and it is melancholy to think, that amidst all the humbling lessons which are taught, in the season of decay some of them are still full of vain conceit, and can talk of nothing but of what they have done, and how much superior their efforts and attainments were to those to which the world has attached more credit. But let it be your exercise to speak of the great things which the Lord hath done, and every year of your long life presents to a faithful memory, and to a grateful heart, interpositions of God in your behalf which may encourage the young to set their hope in him. What an interesting object to the young is an old man whose course is seen to be thus marked by the care, the aid, and the protection of Heaven! and what a shield do not such impressions spread over him to guard him from the petulance which would annoy, or the unkindness which would injure him!

6. This incident teaches Christians to be content to labour in the humblest and most private sphere. Whatever vain glory may suggest, or whatever enthusiasm may urge, the call of Christ is in unison with the dictates of sober wisdom, and the spirit which every disciple of his should cherish, is that which the Psalmist so beautifully describes, and for which he blessed the grace of God that it was his own: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."* Seekest thou great things for thyself, said Jeremiah to Baruch, seek them not.

* Ps. cxxxi. 1.

After conversion, especially if men have been turned from gross profligacy, they are apt to suppose that they must become missionaries and evangelists, and that their grace is too bright and their knowledge too ample for the limited sphere of their family and neighbourhood. Under such impressions they have engaged in measures of public usefulness, for which they had neither capacity nor discretion, and have, by their imprudent zeal, exposed to derision, not only themselves, but the doctrines they professed to teach, and the cause which they pretended to advocate.

It is not very common with us, but there have been instances of parents quitting their families on the Sabbath, where a number of children required their attention, to teach schools in the surrounding villages. Their own children, thus left by those who should have been employed in warning them and teaching them in all wisdom, have been the pest and the terror of their neighbourhood by their quarrelling or their frolics, or by the mischief and violence from which there was none to restrain them. That neglected children in such places should be attended to is certain, but this should be done by those on whom there are no such claims at home. How bitter will be the upbraidings of their own children, if, by such neglect, they are left to the power of evil passions, and to the enticements of sinners, and thus involve themselves in shame and ruin! and how sad their own reflections,—"They made me a keeper of the vineyard, but mine own vineyard have I not kept!" It would be attended with the best effects were pious persons to invite neglected children beside them to

come and share the instructions and counsels which they give to their own families. I have known cases in which this has been done to great advantage, and this mode of pious charity brings with it no neglect of aught that is incumbent at home. A man's family is his first care; and his duty in it must neither be neglected nor abridged for any appearance elsewhere. Where our Lord stations us, let our judge find us.

In these situations let us labour much in the Lord, and he will support us under all our discouragements. How beautifully is this spirit and the regard of Heaven to it illustrated by the following incident!—A West Indian planter sent his son to Britain for his education, and the youth, while in this country, was made acquainted with the Saviour, and returned to his father, not only liberally educated, but richly imbued with the spirit of the gospel. He looked with pity on his father's slaves, and began to speak to them of the grace of Jesus. His father rebuked and prohibited him, but without effect. At length, he threatened to disinherit him, and to banish him from the island, and the ship was ready to receive this outcast; as he was about to step into the boat, he turned about to take the last look of his father's house, from which he was thus driven for the name of Jesus, when his father relented, fell upon his neck, and cried,—"Return, my son, I will never oppose nor interrupt thee more." Most delightful it was to him to resume his task, to lighten the burdens of the wretched, and to see his father's heart melting at the idea of the Saviour's mercy, and longing for that grace which had been so abundant to his son!

ially, Let those yet strangers to the Saviour now
themselves on his compassion and power. You
re the exertion of his power, for you are in a
subjection to sin and Satan, from which Christ
can rescue you. The devil may now employ
influence over you in a manner soft and pleasing;
ay present to you nothing but his flatteries and
ments; but ere long he will assail you by sug-
ns and charges, and terrors the most agonizing,
them he will endeavour to seal your perdition.
if Jesus will pity you, and employ his power
ir behalf. Yes; his pity for wretched sinners
be read in his entreaties and seen in his blood.
d he weep for the sinner's danger if he was in-
nt about his fate? Would he urge his accept-
of his grace if he had no desire for his salva-
? Would he have died for the ungodly if he felt no solicitude to deliver them from the wrath to come? The most loathsome wretchedness cannot exclude you from his pity, nor can the most atrocious guilt exceed his power to save. Though a legion of devils, though an host of corruptions were in your heart, he hath power to cast them out; and though the sorrows of death compassed you about, and the pains of hell had taken hold on you, his mercy can pluck you as a brand from the burning. O cast yourselves, then, on his power and compassion, as the weeping infant does on its mother's bosom, or as the repentant prodigal throws himself at his father's feet! May this be the testimony with which you leave his house this day,—"I came to it careless, but his grace impressed me; I came to it the slave of the devil, but the law

of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death; I came with my heart set on the world, but I leave it devoted to things eternal." And may all of us be monuments of that grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DISCOURSE XII.

IE CHARACTER AND EXERCISE OF AGED SIMEON.

KE ii. 25—30. *And, behold, there was a man in Je-
usalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same
an was just and devout, waiting for the consolation
Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And
as revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he
ould not see death, before he had seen the Lord's
rist. And he came by the Spirit into the temple:
d when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to
for him after the custom of the law, then took he
m up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord,
now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, accord-
ing to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salva-
tion.*

It is seldom that any incident excites much interest in the aged. Detached from the bustle of the world, they know its transactions merely by report, and often disgust those who relate them by the indifference with which they hear of that which is the admiration of the public. Those feelings are blunted which once made them enter so keenly into the occurrences of the surrounding scene, and "the former days were better than these," is the cold and sullen reply which they often make to the account of events which have raised the hearts of the young to ecstacy. What they saw in early life appears to them clothed with all the

attractions which it derived from youthful gaiety and ardour, and is contrasted with what is beheld in all the circumstances of diminution and disgust which can be attached to it by a languid and sickly heart.

But in this passage we behold a scene which, though little adapted to interest a carnal mind, is in the highest degree important and delightful, and which kindled in the heart of aged Simeon the liveliest transport. The character of this man is rich in the qualities of true excellence; and, beholding the infant Saviour clasped in his arms, the Spirit of wisdom and glory resting on his hoary head, his faded cheek glowing with ardent feeling, and his failing heart throbbing with vivid expectation and rapturous delight, we cannot but exclaim, "Hail thou art highly favoured! the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among men."

Never was false taste and credulity more strongly manifested than in the attention which has been given to the fables invented by curiosity or superstition to embellish this narrative, and to heighten our interest in the character and fate of this venerable man. To detail them would be to trifle with your judgment and feelings; let them sleep in the legends of monkery, and let us be assured, that if any man finds not enough in this narrative to fix and to charm his attention, he hath no relish for the simplicity of the Gospel, and no knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

In this passage we behold a most interesting association of infancy and age,—the Saviour entering on the world, and an aged saint quitting it. Here we

see infancy in the fairest form in which it ever was or can be exhibited, and age adorned with its best graces, and enjoying its strongest consolations. In such a scene we behold all that can be desired to make childhood holy, the church delightful, age venerable, and death blessed. Let us then contemplate it with an earnest desire to receive its lessons and to imbibe its spirit.

In this discourse I shall call your attention to the character, the privilege, and the request of this venerable man.

I. Let us mark the character of Simeon. The excellence of this man is presented to us in no elaborate panegyric, but in some of its striking features, and in terms simple and concise. In the lengthened eulogy the attention is often turned from the character to the ardour of the writer, and to the qualities of the composition; but in the descriptions of the Bible it is fixed on the worth exhibited, and the obligation which it imposes is felt and acknowledged.

Let us consider the qualities which are specified in the conduct of this man. He was just. He had been in the former periods of his life distinguished by his fidelity to his engagements, his veracity in his statements, his honesty in his dealings, and his care to give to all their due; and though amidst the seclusion of old age he had not the same opportunities as formerly of testifying his regard to justice, he, in every way in which it could be done, showed his uprightness. The noble resolution of Job was his:—"Till I die I will

not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."*

There have been old men who have been abhorred or feared for their deceit and knavery. They have artfully gained the confidence of youth, to abuse it for their own interest or that of their friends; they have taken ungenerous advantage of the straits of those to whom they intrusted their money or goods: the maxims they have instilled into the young have been those of a crooked and selfish policy; they have disregarded the claims which the relatives of those who once befriended them have on their aid, and in their disposal of their property have acted according to the dictates of arbitrary humour, of favouritism or prejudice, and not according to the rules of equity or justice. But the old man who is entitled to the character in the text will use his experience to teach the young prudence and discretion; will be eager to fulfil every claim sanctioned by gratitude and honour, though it cannot be enforced by law; and will regulate his worldly arrangements by the strictest impartiality.

Let those in the active scenes of life be persuaded, that justice is the surest guide to success in any worldly pursuit, and its best security when attained; and let the young consider, that the habits of duplicity, intrigue, and treachery at that period will assuredly lead to the villany whose sad result is infamy and ruin.

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* Job xxvii. 5, 6.

e w: also devout. Some pique themselves on justice, deem it quite sufficient to give worth to character, speak of devotion with contempt, ap- to its exercises the most degrading epithets, and esent it as in general the covering of knavery. hing can be more false and wicked than such re- ntations. That is the only justice worthy of the ne which is prompted by the fear of God, and ch is influenced by a regard to his authority. The of shame and of punishment may deter a man the open invasion of his neighbour's rights, but covetous wish, or the fraudulent purpose, can be checked by religious principle.

neon was not only just but devout. He was a ctual observer still of all the ordinances of reli- n. This had been the habit of his former years, and he could not have been happy unless he had still watched daily at Wisdom's gates. Those who have been careless about religious ordinances in youth and middle life, are generally found in old age eager to avail themselves of every pretext for absence, will offer to take any employment which will furnish them with an apology, and when, in circumstances where no excuse is deemed necessary, will, without scruple, disregard every holy service; but the pious old man feels that the house of God is the scene of his best enjoyment, and longs for the Sabbath as the day of the gladness of his heart.

But the expression likewise intimates, that he lived under the influence of all the feelings and principles of piety. Knowing the Lord as revealed in his word, he loved him with a pure heart fervently, reposed in

him entire and unlimited confidence, shuddered at the idea of offending him, and felt an ardent zeal for his glory. He maintained a solemn sense of his constant inspection, and walked, not only in his ordinances, but in his commandments blameless.

Simeon lived at a period and in a place where rites and ceremonies were viewed as the whole of piety, and where the religion of the heart was neither inculcated nor exemplified by those who sat in the seat of Moses; yet was he eminent in the power of godliness; he worshipped God in the spirit, and walked before him in the land of the living.

Devotion is the best solace of age. In this sanctuary the peace of God rules in the heart, and everlasting rest opens to the view. The sighs and the groans which cannot be uttered are known to our Father who seeth in secret; and this shall be the testimony, borne from on high to him who hath lived in love to God and to man, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

It is mentioned, as the last feature of his character, that he waited for the consolation of Israel. This was a character of the Messiah given to him in consequence of some of the ancient prophecies respecting his coming, and it was peculiarly gratifying to the Jews at this time on account of the evils under which they groaned. In the Messiah they expected to find a deliverer from an oppression painful in itself and odious to their pride, and a conqueror who should raise Israel to a prosperity, dominion, and glory beyond all that it had known in its happiest days.

But the pious felt that they were under a yoke

re intolerable than that of Rome or Babylon, even
bondage of corruption; that they had enemies
re formidable than any of the powers of this world,
en Satan and his angels; that they were exposed
evils more horrible than human malice could in-
t, even the vengeance of eternal fire; and that
re were blessings more valuable than dominion
glory, even peace with God and the liberty of his
dren; and this deliverance and this felicity they
cted by the Messiah.

now, such were the views which Simeon had of
Saviour. In this character he believed that he
ld come; for his approach with such blessings he
d earnestly; and, in spite of every temptation
patience, arising from the pressure of the evils
ch the Messiah would remedy, and his own ad-
vanced period of life, he waited for his arrival.

My aged friends, ye know that the Word was made flesh, but he is coming the second time without sin to the salvation of them that look for him; and I call on you to gird up the loins of your minds, to be sober, and to hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. You ought also to wait for his coming to you in the consolations and supports of his grace. Worldly comfort is retiring from you, but religious comfort is approaching; and it is comfort which will gladden all your solitary hours, and mitigate all your feelings of pain and languor.

II. Let us now consider the signal manifestations of the Divine regard to this venerable man.

The Evangelist tells us that the Holy Ghost was upon him. This is not to be understood merely of his sharing of the grace of the Spirit, but it hath a reference to his extraordinary influence as the Spirit of prophecy. The gift of prophecy had not been vouchsafed since the days of Malachi; and after a suspension of four hundred years, it was now imparted to signalize the birth of Christ. The knowledge of the future is the object of eager curiosity to man; and no study hath been deemed too severe and no sacrifice too great to attain it; but the insight arising from the Spirit of prophecy comes from the noblest source; is an intelligence which could have been obtained by no other means; and is marked by a certainty to which the most sagacious speculations of human foresight have no pretensions.

There were prophetic intimations which were afflicting to those to whom they were given, from the calamities and the judgments which they made known as approaching; but these made to Simeon related to the happiest event that ever took place on earth, and from which blessings should flow, extensive as its wide population and lasting as eternity.

You have no reason to expect any supernatural revelations. The idea, that some aged persons have power to predict what is future, is a gross conceit of superstition; and this peculiar penetration of theirs has been supposed to arise from the disclosures made to them by the devil: but to show the things which are to come hereafter is not his prerogative; and all the pretences made to it by oracles and divinations, by astrologers and fortune-tellers, have been the im-

pudent quackery of imposture. It is enough for you that the Spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you; that ye are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise; and that He is the earnest of your future and unfading inheritance.

But we are also informed, that it was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. It might be suggested to Simeon by others, and the idea might arise in his own mind, that he was too far advanced in years to have any rational hope of seeing the Messiah in the flesh. Every feeling of infirmity, and every token of decay, would have increased his anxiety; but this was precluded by this gracious intimation of Heaven, which was given as the reward of his faith and patience. This intimation was not the dream of dotage, or the assurance of flattery, but proceeded from the Spirit of wisdom. In this intimation he might feel confident amidst all the infirmities of age, all the delay so trying to nature, and all the instances of mortality around him.

You may feel solicitous to live till events have happened which have long been the object of your anxious expectation. Many an aged parent has wished to live till he saw a long-absent son return to him in safety, and thinks that if he were near him to lay his hand on his eyes he would cheerfully depart. Many an aged saint has desired to live till he saw institutions formed and plans accomplished for the promotion of wisdom and godliness, and feels that with the expectations which they warrant he could leave the world without regret. Providence may not protract

your life till this is the case; but if you in your last hour see the Saviour coming to receive you to himself, you need not repine at your not beholding aught which this earthly scene can present to the view.

But let us attend to the happy fulfilment of this intimation. As it became our Lord to fulfil all righteousness, in his infancy and childhood there was an exact compliance, on the part of his parents, with the requirements of the law; and at the appointed time they brought the babe to the temple, that they might present him to the Lord, and pay the redemption-money for him. At this very period Simeon was led to the temple, and there received the end of his faith. It is easy to see why this place was selected for his meeting with the infant Redeemer. As a devout man the temple had been the scene of his favourite resort; in its services he had felt the highest delight; even in old age he was glad when it was said to him, "Go ye up to the house of the Lord;" and often had he poured forth there the ardent wish of his soul,—"Oh! that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion;" and with the utmost propriety was he in this place blessed with the sight for which he had so long waited.

To aged Christians I may say, it is in the sanctuary of God that you have your best discoveries of the Divine glory. It is there where the promise shall be accomplished to you, "Thine eye shall see the King in his beauty, and behold the land that is afar off;" and in the dedication of the young there to the Lord you shall feel the assurance, that all things are yours, because ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

But how did Simeon act? He took the babe in his arms, as a public token of his acceptance of the Saviour, and of his affection to him. In this you see how God in his goodness exceeds the expectations of his people. It was promised to Simeon that he should see the Saviour; but he sees and embraces him, and blesses God for what he beheld, felt, enjoyed, and anticipated. This was the happiest moment he had ever experienced on earth,—a moment in which all his affections clung to the Saviour, and all his benedictions were invoked on his head, in which all his wishes for earth were consummated, and all his hopes of glory were secured.

It seldom happens as to earthly things that they appear when attained to correspond with the ideas which we had formed of them; nay, we often feel ashamed of the extravagance of our conceits, and of the vehemence of our wishes; but in this babe Simeon beheld the best gift of infinite love, the only atonement of human guilt, the destined conqueror of death and hell, and the pledge of salvation with eternal glory.

Providence sometimes gratifies the aged by permitting them to clasp in their arms, to place in their bosom, or to bear on their knees their infant grandchildren; and the pleasure felt by them is exquisitely sweet. Nay, there have been children long separated from parents, with regard to whom they are made to say, as Jacob did of Joseph, "I had not thought to see thy face, and, lo! God hath showed me thy seed also;" but let them remember, that it is in embracing the Saviour in faith and love that their purest, no-

blest, and most rapturous felicity shall be enjoyed, and to Him let them cleave with purpose of heart.

And let the aged abound in thanksgiving. It has been remarked, that this occupies a small space in the devotional exercises of some who are advanced in life, and that they are less engaged in blessing God than in complaining of men; but they ought to remember, that praise is comely for the aged; that they have a life marked with mercy to acknowledge; all spiritual blessings in heavenly places to ascribe to the riches of God's goodness; and that they see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, that he, by the grace of God, should taste of death for every man, crowned with glory and honour, for the suffering of death, and for the consummation of our happiness.

III. Let us now consider the request of Simeon,—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

There have been various meanings assigned to the term here employed to designate death, but the most natural is that of release. Simeon had not become weary of his Master's service. Long had he laboured in it, and to him it appeared at this moment more strongly his duty and his delight than ever; but he found this world a state of confinement and restraint, in which he could not serve God so promptly and so fully as he wished, and on this account he longed to be in heaven, where he might honour Him in a way more consonant to the pious feelings of his heart.

The appetites of the body, and the customs and prejudices of the world, impede good men in the service of God; and there is a law in their members which wars against the law of their mind. A morbid habit of body, and frequent infirmities, spread a gloom over the soul, and unfit some for the active duties of piety and charity; and the opposition given by the men of the world to schemes of religious reformation discourages the feeble-minded, and they long for the place where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

Simeon applies to God to release him. Some have boasted of a man's having it in his power to escape from a troublesome world when he finds his situation desperate, and have censured the horror with which such a deed is viewed as the effect of superstition operating on weak minds. Some aged persons have thought an act of this kind justifiable at their period of life, when they are completely useless to others, when they are regarded as a burden by their friends, and when they have no enjoyment to sweeten the dregs of nature, and no hope that they shall again be able to serve their generation; but it ought to be remembered how much God may be glorified, and others may be benefited by our exercise of the passive virtues, that your impressions of the light in which others regard you may be utterly unwarranted, and that, having enjoyed so long a cheerful period of existence, it is most ungrateful to shorten the days of darkness at its close. It is most wicked thus to throw away so precious a gift of Heaven, and by one fatal act to rush into irremediable wretchedness. On such

victims of despair the reflecting mind cannot look without shuddering; on the scene where the horrid deed was done, a black cloud rests, and the fiends of darkness seem to haunt it as the place of their triumph.

How different are the views and feelings of the good man! He knows that in the hands of his Lord are the keys of death, and to him he saith, "My times are in thy hand, and as to my continuance or removal, not my will but thine be done." He wishes not to be removed till his Master's pleasure is signified, and his appointed task is done. But Simeon asks to be dismissed in peace. Simeon had the assurance that God was at peace with him; but he might wish to have some further tokens of the Divine complacency, and every uneasy thought about a future world kept from his mind; and it is most desirable when we are dying to hear that voice from Heaven which says, "I am pacified to thee for all that thou hast done;" to behold the Almighty rising from his throne to meet us in mercy; to have no distracting solicitude as to our future destiny; no remorse afflicting the soul for the past; and no fear, to confound us in the prospect of judgment.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints, and he delights thus to bless it. The body may be shaken by convulsion, but guilt does not agitate the heart. On the pale countenance may be seen the expression of entire resignation; and during the whole of the last conflict of nature, the soul is rising to God as its rest, and anticipates deliverance from pain and sorrow. The pious man may not now have so bright a blaze of joy as at the noon of life,

ı milder and sweeter sunshine shall light him to grave.

The world may give flattery to the dying, pomp to funeral, celebrity to the name, and splendour to monument, but peace is the gift of God alone, it is bestowed as his gracious reward of a devout, and beneficent life. Of such a life it is the com- the appropriate, and the desirable close. Mark erfect man, and behold the upright, for the end man is peace!

asking this peaceful dismission, Simeon solicits cording to God's word. It seems evident that he stood the revelation which he had received as g that his death would soon follow his sight saviour, and he asks an immediate dismission. ne have cried for death when they felt that they were in no immediate danger; and others have done this when disgusted with the world through disappointment and vexation; but Simeon prays for it in the scene of his greatest happiness, and wished that with it his life might close.

Let us then inquire how an immediate dismissal from the world appeared so desirable to this venerable man.

1. The scene which he now witnessed could not but detach his mind from the world. When the mind is engaged with any great object or event, nothing else has power to attract our attention. To him who meets with a long-absent and much-loved friend, the objects which engross the talk of others appear insipid. Good men have felt, in the hour of communion with God, an utter disregard of the most at-

tractive of worldly scenes; and this must have been peculiarly the case with Simeon, in whom sense, and faith, and the Spirit of glory, were now operating to produce the most vivid impressions of divine and heavenly objects. Many things which once attached him to this earth had passed away, and all that remained were at this moment deprived of their power. The ceremonies of the Temple could not be all his desire whose soul was occupied with Him who is the way, the truth, and the life; and the fortunes of Judah could not excite his solicitude who beheld Messiah rejoicing in the homage of a restored universe, and all the ends of the earth seeing the salvation of God.

It may be said, Why did not Simeon wish to live till Messiah had actually finished his work of instruction, obedience, and suffering? But his advanced age showed him the folly of any such desire; and he had at this moment as clear views of the course of his Saviour as if he had been a follower of his steps. Besides, in the world to which he was going, Jesus, a holy child; Jesus, in the labours of industry; Jesus going about doing good; Jesus, an atoning sacrifice, would be objects of unceasing and affectionate attention.

To him who has seen the glory of the Saviour full of grace and truth, who hath an interest in the favour which is better than life, who hath found the pearl of great price, and is crowned with the honour that comes from God, there can be little to interest in the speculations of worldly wisdom, the smiles of the great, the vain show of a moment, or the riches which

perish in the using; they are lost, like the glow-worm, amidst the effulgence of day.

My aged friends, ye profess that your hearts are detached from the world; but take heed lest your reluctance to depart should make the truth of your profession questionable. And what hath produced this detachment? You may be merely sated with the enjoyments, or irritated by the vexations of life. Happy is it when it proceeds from the felt superiority of heavenly objects, and from the sight of the glory which shines in the face of Jesus.

2. This was a scene happily adapted to scatter the terrors of death. It is painful to think on the struggle which precedes death; but Simeon could rejoice that the salvation of God would not leave him without support or relief. The idea of appearing before God to give account of our whole conduct is appalling; but he whom Simeon now saw had this for his destined office,—to save his people from their sins. The idea of dying in the presence of lamenting friends is trying to nature; but Simeon felt that he was dying under the eye and the mercy of the Saviour.

The state to which death reduces the body is horrible to nature; but the mind of Simeon could reason thus:—"Mine eyes have seen God's salvation, and can I complain that the dust shall cover them? I have pressed him to my heart, and shall I complain that it must become like a clod of the valley?" The continuance of the body in the grave is an idea which afflicts the reflecting mind; but Simeon felt that Jesus would not be God's salvation if he did not redeem

us from death, and ransom us from the power of the grave. In looking on the countenance of his Lord, so bright and so gracious, the good man forgets that the face of death is dark and fierce; and in Christ's embrace there is nothing in his cold grasp, or in his lone retreat, which hath power to fill us with dismay.

3. In this scene Simeon's mind was in that frame in which a good man would wish to leave the world. Gratitude and love, faith and joy, are the principles in the exercise of which a saint would wish to die, and these were now called forth in all their power and in all their consolations. Simeon felt the most fervid gratitude to Him who had sent his Son to be the propitiation for sins, and the strongest affection to Him who had thus rescued and honoured our degraded nature, and had no eye, no hand, and no heart, but for him.

He felt the fullest confidence in his accomplishment of the task which he had undertaken, and his Spirit rejoiced in God his Saviour. That foresight of the happy results of the Messiah's coming which dictated the song of angels,—"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men," he now felt; nay, the Spirit which dictates the unceasing ascription of glory to the Lamb in the temple on high prompted his homage.

These impressions and feelings are the commencement of the work and the spirit of Heaven; and in beholding them exercised in a lively manner, we lose sight of the symptoms of mortality and corruption, and conceive ourselves standing, not at the gates of the grave, but at the portals of heaven. Who does

not shudder at the thought of leaving the world with a mind soured by disappointment, distracted by fear, or clouded by despondency? and who would not wish to die rejoicing in the prospects and blessings of salvation? We have heard of the calmness of the philosopher, the levity of the wit, and the intrepidity of the hero, in the hour of death, and these have been applauded by men according to their particular tempers and habits; but religion is justified of her children, and in the consciences of those who affect to despise it, in the virtues of its course and in the graces of its close.

4. The privileges which Simeon now enjoyed were the foretaste of a sublimer felicity which awaited him in heaven. Now he had the infant Saviour in his arms, but in heaven he should behold the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father; now he enjoyed prophetic illumination, but in heaven the whole plans of Jehovah respecting our race are presented to the view of minds purified, expanded, and invigorated, secured from every thing which could impede or withdraw their perceptions, or mar the felicity of contemplation; now he saw Christ presented in the temple, but in heaven he should see him appearing in the presence of God for us; now he saw Jesus made in the likeness of sinful flesh, but in heaven he should behold him as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

To this felicity his present enjoyments were intended to elevate his mind; and this is your Saviour's object, my aged friends, in the communion he holds with you, to detach you from the present world, and

to elevate your hearts to a holier scene. If it be so delightful to sit for a moment under his shadow, what must it be to dwell under it for ever! and if it is so pleasing to hear him expressing his love to you, and his approbation of your services, what must you feel when he comes to receive you to himself, and to bear to you his open and final testimony! If the mercy which pardons is so valued, and if the mercy which solaces be so sweet, what must mercy to eternal life be!

CONCLUSION.

Let me exhort the aged to make the excellencies of practical religion, which have been set before them in this discourse, more the object of their love, their study, and their culture, than ever. This is Jehovah's end in all that he bestows, and in all that he promises: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* To you also I address this advice, Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord. He cannot disappoint the expectations of wisdom nor the wishes of piety.

Let the sanctuary of God be the place you love best on earth; and beautifully may these words be applied to express the pious wishes of the aged amidst their desolate circumstances:—"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee: my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land,

* Micah vi. 8.

here no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, as
ave seen thee in the sanctuary."* The aged are
en first at Wisdom's gates, and last in quitting
m. It is good when this is the result of pious at-
hment; and let this be the object for which you
wish to live, that you may see Jesus more honoured,
and that you may attain more conformity to him.

Beware of rash wishes for death. These have been
es expressed in a way neither creditable to
th nor your patience. Leave them to the
d to the peevish; and while it is needful for
to remain in the flesh, be willing to continue.
e ordinances of religion, in the satisfactions of
ess, in the fair promise of the young, in the
f the evening of life, and in the care of Him
iveth power to the faint, you will find the last
of your pilgrimage pleasant.

his subject may reconcile us to the departure of
tigious friends. They have entered into peace, and
ey rest with God. The Lord hath fulfilled their
wish as to themselves, and you know that, as to you,
it was their desire that you should join them in hea-
ven. It rests with you whether this wish shall be
realized or not. While Nature droops, and looks at
the scene with an eye dimmed with tears, while it
sighs at the thought of the coldness of a parent's
heart, the ghastliness of the face of beauty, and the
silence of the voice of love, let faith, while it surveys
the peace of their dismission, and thinks of their flesh
resting in hope, say, "Blessed are the dead which

* Psalm lxiii. 1, 2.

die in the Lord." O that the peace which blessed their departure may shed a cheering ray over the dark melancholy of the desolate heart!

Let me call on good men to cultivate an increasing acquaintance with God's salvation, in the diligent observance of religious ordinances. Christ in the word, and Christ in the sanctuary, must be sought by you daily, for there shall you see him; and in the practice of righteousness you shall walk in the light of his countenance. While the fantastic and disorderly enthusiast is left to intrude into those things which he hath not seen, and is vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind, to him that ordereth his conversation aright shall be shown the salvation of God.

Let not the aged be unwilling to depart. For wise reasons Providence hath ordained that the relish for life is not lost even amidst its severest calamities and its utmost decays; but wisdom and piety should teach you how unbecoming it is in you to be reluctant to go away when the Master is come and calls for you. How many have been removed from situations more useful than yours, and ere they had reached the half of your age! While you are at home in the body, you are absent from the Lord, and should therefore be willing to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Meditate on the texts in which a peaceful departure is promised to the good, and plead them in prayer. It is at these places that your Bibles should be found lying open beside you, and desire your young connexions to read them to you. Thus will they learn to consider their latter end, and to pursue that course in life which will ren-

nappy. Sweet to the aged is the lesson of holy
m, and it hath a peculiar interest when read by
voice of youthful piety. Often hath this prayer
ended before God during such an exercise, that the
age read and heard may be made life and peace
oth.

t unconverted men reflect how different their cha-
er is from that of Simeon. Ye neither fear God
regard man. You have not the Spirit of Christ,
Saviour himself is the object of your neglect
atred; and what shall be the end of such a
e but death? not death in peace, but in horror;
there should be no bands in your death, it will
avation of your perdition. It will give
when you are dying, that you have
in its charms and sin in its pleasures,
ns will render death more frightful. It will be
an to ask from God a dismission in peace, for this
will be his answer,—"How can there be peace when
thy abominations are so many?" The salvation of
God you have never desired nor sought, and how
shall you escape while scorning the only remedy, and
persisting in the practices against which the wrath of
God is revealed from heaven?

Still Christ is in the temple, and he is here to be offered to you: "Hearken to me, ye that are stout-hearted and far from righteousness; behold, I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation it shall not tarry."* O regard this offer as you will wish you had done when the things that belong to

* Isaiah xlvi. 12, 13.

your peace are passing away from your eyes! May a sense of your guilt and danger induce you to cry for redemption through his blood; and may the view which we have taken of the character and departure of Simeon excite in you this wish, which the grace of God can and will realize in every sincere suppliant, "Let me live the life of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

DISCOURSE XIII.

ON PATIENCE.

ES i. 4. *Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

UGH various assertions and injunctions in Scrip- have been considered as strange and unaccount- such reasons may be assigned for them as will v every candid mind that they are both wise od. The declaration of Solomon, that it is bet- to go to the house of mourning than that of feast- , has often been ridiculed by the gay libertine; it is certain, that in the scene of sorrow the mind formed to humility and sobriety, while in jovial scenes the folly of the heart is encouraged, and every thing interesting to us as immortal beings is forgotten.

Our Lord, in his Sermon on the Mount, pronounces his blessing on the poor, the mourners, and the persecuted; and their happiness, even as to the present life, will be evident to every person who considers the protection which humility affords from envy and violence, the solacing influence of godly sorrow, and that supernatural fortitude, and that perfect peace, with which God supports those who suffer for righteousness' sake.

In the second verse of this chapter, James exhorts the saints to whom he wrote to count it all joy when they fell into divers temptations. To some this will

appear a hard saying; and it is true, that we cannot rejoice in affliction considered merely in itself; but when we think on the fatherly care from which it proceeds, the lessons it powerfully teaches, and the improvement in grace and peace to which it leads, we must admit the truth of the Psalmist's statement, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of thy law."* In accordance with it the Apostle shows, that those trials of their faith produced patience, and form that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price. Having mentioned this result of sanctified tribulation, he, in the words of the text, calls them to the assiduous cultivation of this grace, as essentially necessary to Christian perfection. Though the persecutions of the primitive Christians rendered it peculiarly necessary to address to them such exhortations, and called on the Apostle James to commence this Epistle with them, they are required in every age by the disciples of Jesus. Even the youngest should learn to possess his soul in patience; and to the aged it is a virtue for which there is an increasing call in their gathering darkness and daily infirmities.

In the following discourse I shall explain the nature of this grace; illustrate the exhortation, Let patience have her perfect work; and point out the strength of the motive here used to enforce it.

I. In explaining the nature of patience, I begin by remarking, that it is a grace of the Holy Spirit, and

* Psalm xciv. 12.

is by no means to be confounded with that constitutional hardiness, or apathy of mind, which renders some men insensible to the most affecting events. A person of this cast will make no allowance for the anguish of the mourner, whose heart bleeds for the loss of a much-loved relative or friend, or for the sick who groan by reason of affliction; and while he condemns such persons as betraying a despicable weakness of spirit, boasts of the agonies he has borne in silence, and the friends he has laid in the dust, without a tear; but a thoughtless disregard, a sullen contempt, or a proud defiance of God's correcting hand, must not be accounted patience. With the most rigid of the ancient philosophers, insensibility was deemed the perfection of wisdom and virtue; and with barbarous nations it is considered as the noblest heroism to endure the most horrid torture without shrinking. We wonder not at the false views of the savage, when we consider the scenes in which he moves, and the habits to which he is formed; but it is amazing that men, to whom human nature was the object of elaborate study in its passions and feelings, should have placed excellence in the suppression and not in the regulation of these principles.

In order to constitute patience there must be a deep sense of the value of the blessings of which we are deprived, and of the necessity of those for which we wait; and it is the proper work of this principle to check all those murmurs which might be produced by the removal of the one, or by the delay of the other.

Such a principle can be produced by no efforts of

reason, and by no deductions of philosophy. By such methods men may be brought to a forgetfulness or to a disregard of the evils of life; but it is Divine grace alone which can teach us to recognise the hand of God in calamity, and which makes us hear with meekness and with awe the voice which says,—"Be still, and know that I am God." The fruit of the Spirit is long suffering. By the discipline of conviction he humbles the pride of the heart; by his illumination of the mind he gives us such views of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, as show us the reasonableness of acquiescence in all that he does; and by his sanctifying influence he makes us willing to be what God commands, to bear what he imposes, to relinquish what he requires, and to wait till he relieves or bestows.

2. Patience is manifested in a cheerful submission to the trials of life. The good man is led to such views of the necessity of these trials, and of the end of Providence in sending them, as cannot fail to calm his mind. He perceives the mercy there is in God's frowns, and the kindness there is in his strokes. How full of force and beauty is the reasoning of the Apostle Paul,—"We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."* Figure to yourselves a good man confined for years

* Heb. xii. 9, 10.

to a bed of languishing, chastened frequently with sore pain, his worldly substance exhausted by his being so long debarred from labour, his friends ceasing to act to him with kindness, and his neighbours shutting their bowels of compassion: instead of the condolence of pity, or the ministrations of kindness, he has to bear cold neglect and cruel mockery. Place a worldly man in such circumstances, and every waking hour will be spent in cursing the day of his birth and the severity of Providence; but the good man is meek and calm, and when he opens his lips it is to sing of mercy rejoicing over judgment.

This patience under afflictions results from a conviction of their beneficent object. The good man is convinced that the advantages of which he has been deprived could not have been retained without injury to his best interests, and that he is much safer and should be much happier without them. Better is the contempt that humbles us, the loss which detaches us from the world, and the disease that wastes our strength, than the applause which puffs up, the prosperity which makes earth attractive, and the vigour which cherishes presumption. We are offended with the froward child who struggles to retain that with which he will undoubtedly do harm either to himself or to others, and who frets and rages when it is taken from him; and much more to be condemned are we when we strive with our Maker, while he removes what would be kept to our ruin. This is another consideration which produces this submission under the afflictions of life, that God corrects us in measure, and chastises us less than our sins deserve. What is the

situation of him who is afflicted in body to that of the wounded spirit? What are the decaying faculties of age to hopeless idiocy or raging madness? What is the situation of him who has met with considerable losses to his who hath been bereft of his all? And what is the gloom and anguish of the most unhappy lot on earth to the misery of that place where the smoke of torment ascendeth up for ever and ever? He who is delivered from the wrath to come hath no reason to complain, though from the troubles and sorrows of the world death alone should free him.

3. It is manifested in the steadfast pursuit of religion in spite of all its difficulties. View it as apparent in the pursuit of religious knowledge. In all subjects of speculation, difficulties must occur to damp the ardour of inquiry. Many efforts are made in vain to obtain a solution of the difficulties which perplex us; our investigations are censured as presumptuous and ridiculed as hopeless, and the abuse which is sometimes made of the principles we have laid down stamps them with discredit. Perseverance, in spite of these obstacles, displays the energy of the mind, and is accomplished by means of patience. Had it not been for this principle, men of wisdom and genius would have abandoned those researches which have terminated so gloriously. Important discoveries have been sometimes made by a short and simple process, in an unexpected moment and by incidents apparently accidental; but in general they have been the result of long and laborious application, in which discouragements have been resisted and opposition overcome by a patience zealous, steadfast, and enduring.

Many are the difficulties we must expect to meet with in the pursuit of religious knowledge. The corruptions and prejudices of our own minds, the errors and mistakes of our brethren, and the sublimity of gospel-truths, so far transcending our limited powers, form obstructions in our way which patience only can surmount. It is not in compliance with a feeble wish that light will arise to us; we must cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding. It is not by a slight examination of the surface that it is to be found; we must seek for it as for silver, and search for it as for hid treasure; then shall we understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

Patience, too, is manifested in the practice of religion. Many are the difficulties which impede the exercise of the Christian graces, and some of them arise from ourselves, others from the world. Many have abandoned their sober habits because they wanted firmness to resist the enticements of the dissolute; and some have discontinued their charities because of the ungrateful returns which were made for their bounty. Some have been zealous for the Lord of hosts while a religious profession was new to them, while they were animated by the ardour of pious guides, and while they saw it to be a ready way to influence and to reputation; but when these considerations cease to operate, they become indifferent to the interests of truth and godliness.

But we must run with patience the race that is set before us. Though the wicked should try to drive us from our course, though they should ridicule us as righteous overmuch, abuse the most honourable

names by employing them as epithets of reproach against us; as the term saint is now used, in the slang of the libertine, as puritan formerly was, for a hypocrite and a knave under the mask of zeal and devotion; though they should threaten to injure us in various ways to check our progress, none of these things must move us, neither must we count our lives dear to ourselves that we may finish our course with joy. Be thou faithful to the death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

4. Patience is manifested in forbearance and kindness to our fellow-men. Offences must needs come. There are some injuries for which a regard to our true interests impels us to require reparation; but patience will dispose us to seek it without rancour or violence, and where insults and abuse can be overlooked consistently with our duty, it will incline us to do so. The contemplation of his conduct, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," calms the mind under the most injurious treatment. The tongue that has slandered you will soon be silent in the grave, and no truly upright character can be long darkened by calumny. Were this temper prevalent, the quarrels which divide neighbourhoods, the lawsuits which are begun and prosecuted under the influence of anger and revenge to the hurt of both parties, and the duels, which are so frequently the result of a momentary irritation at language or conduct which the offender will not stoop to explain, and for which the offended party, in exasperated pride, demands a redress too

humiliating for the injury, would no longer be the curse and the disgrace of society.

Patience must also be manifested in domestic intercourse; we are not to imagine that the sick-bed is the only place in a dwelling where this temper is to be displayed. When parents teach their children, patience must dispose them to bear with their dullness, and not to wound the feelings of the delicate and the feeble mind by degrading contrasts of their slow progress with the proficiency of one more acute and active. When you correct children, it must not be in a sudden impulse of passion, but after gentle methods have been tried in vain; and when you have found it necessary to assume the appearance of coldness or displeasure to bring them to a sense of their folly, no yearnings of affection must lead you to alter your manner till you have reason to be satisfied with their penitence.

This principle keeps the voice of rejoicing in the tabernacles of the righteous from being marred by murmurs or brawls. Neither beauty, nor grandeur, nor wealth, can preserve the harmony of families without patience; nay, they often foster irritability of temper; but where she dwells and rules, her mild countenance, her soft answer, and her gentle manners, must maintain love and peace.

We sometimes require admonitions from our brethren; and patience will keep us from spurning them away as officious or insulting, and will incline us to welcome them as a kindness. Even in those cases in which we have reason to think that the reproof proceeds from improper motives, we ought, if it is just,

to be thankful for it, and to profit by it; and, when it is unmerited, we must show them that blame us, in a prudent and temperate manner, that they have been misinformed, or that they have not judged with candour, and that their prejudices have led them to treat us with an injustice which we can both repel and forgive.

5. Patience is shown in the steadfast expectation of the blessings of grace and glory. Sometimes good men have to wait long ere their prayers are answered. When they cry and shout, God seems to shut out their prayers in anger, or to be entirely regardless of them; but patience will incline us to pray without ceasing, and to increase instead of declining in the earnestness of our supplications. What an affecting example of this was set us by our Lord in his agony, when he prayed more earnestly, and when he thrice said,—"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but thine be done!" It is painful to have the bestowal of blessings deferred as to you which you see enjoyed by others; to behold others rejoicing in the conversion of their children, and some of the young in careless and profligate families turned to the Lord, while your offspring are going on in their trespasses; to see others moving to their graves in a gentle decline and in sweet tranquillity, while you are chastened by pain and harassed by fear: but patience will teach you quietly to wait for the promised redemption. When afflictions are peculiarly oppressive, when the friends by whom life was blessed are gone, and when their views of the land of uprightness are bright, good men may be too ardent in their

wishes for a speedy departure; their language is, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest;" "Let us go also, that we may die with him; and set ye open to me the gates of righteousness, then will I enter in at them and bless the Lord:" but patience will teach us to wait God's time for being received into glory. The crown of righteousness cannot be put on till God sees us fit for it, and the duties of earth must be finished ere we enter into rest. Thy admission to heaven, O Christian, is more strongly desired and more earnestly solicited by thy Lord, than it can be by thee; but he will not conduct thee to it till thou art qualified for the world where righteousness dwells. These considerations should make holy men wait quietly for life eternal. The longer their admission to heaven is delayed, the more is Christ honoured and society benefited by the labours of the good, and the fuller will be their reward, and the more ample their song. Aged saints will have this peculiarity in their song, that it will detail the mercy which bore them when their strength failed, the kindness which cheered them when dark and lonely, and the grace which made their latter end more happy than their beginning.

I may remark, before I leave this part of the subject, that old age is a season in which this grace is peculiarly requisite, and in which there is frequent occasion for its exercise. In the afflictions men meet with at earlier periods of life, they have the hope of their speedy removal, and that they shall enjoy many years of comfort in the land of the living; but no

release can be expected from the infirmities of age; nay, they must become more severe daily. Besides, that strength of mind by which they bore the pressure of evils when in the vigour of life hath then passed away; and I may add, that less sympathy is shown by friends to the ailments of the aged, than to those felt at other seasons, with which we are less familiar, and which we do not imagine will long require our compassionate attention. Amidst such temptations to fretfulness and despondency the old man must be gentle and peaceable, grateful for every kindness, however small, and joyful in that strength which sustains the fainting spirit. Such a temper lightens his infirmities to himself and to his friends. I have seen aged persons poor, frail, and lonely, yet with a sweeter smile of contentment on their faces, and a fuller song of praise on their lips, than is to be met with in situations far more favourable. They have thanked the Lord for a dwelling in which the eye of contentment saw no meanness, for kindnesses in which the heart of gratitude felt nought that was humiliating, and for a solitude in which the spirit of piety was conscious of no seclusion.

Let not the aged poor think that it is the clamorous who receive most relief. Some, indeed, may relieve them to be rid of their importunities, and others may be imposed on by their long detail of grievances; but this cannot be the case frequently. The meek and the grateful, on the other hand, will be peculiarly the care of the charitable; they will keep whatever favour they gain; and they will find, that the temper which

amiable to others is a blessing to themselves. honourable to aged Christians when the detail of infirmities and ailments can be accompanied a statement of the patience with which they are ne.

II. Let us now consider the import of the exhorta- . Let Patience have her perfect work in you. This intimates, that our patience should rise to ighest improvements of which it is susceptible. nust labour to attain such measures of this grace glorify Providence in the whole of its dealings us. It is not enough that in a calamity, by which eelings are but slightly touched, we are calm and omissive; but, when we are struck to the heart, we st bow in devout acquiescence. It is not enough, when an evil comes upon us in its lightest form, that we are silent; but we must be so when it rushes upon us in its utmost severity. It is not enough that we do not render evil for evil, or railing for railing; we must love our enemies, pray for them that curse us, and do good to them that despitefully use us and persecute us. It is not enough that we listen to the voice of consolation under our sorrows; but we must be willing to minister to the relief of others, even though their afflictions should be less oppressive than our own. In pointing your attention to the brightest examples of this grace which the world has seen, I will not bid you look to martyrs glorying in tribulation, but to Him who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame; in

whom no malignant feeling ever rose amidst the most cruel torture, and in whom despair never operated even in the blackest darkness; who died for enemies, and offered himself without spot to God.

2. It intimates, that we should endeavour to persevere in the exercise of this grace to the end, in spite of the continuance and the increase of our troubles. When we are first visited by affliction, there are various considerations which render us calm and submissive; but when we are made to possess mouths of vanity, the arguments which composed our minds seem to have lost their efficacy, and we are in danger of saying,—"This evil is hopeless, why should I wait on the Lord any longer?"—Behold Job, a man so eminent in patience, that, when his earthly happiness seemed ruined, he could say, after the awful desolation was accomplished, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also?" Yet even he sunk at last under the anguish of protracted suffering, and the harshness of uncandid friends, and said,—"Why died I not from the womb? why did not I give up the ghost when I came out of my mother's belly? for now I should have lien still, and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest."* We see also in the prophet Elijah, a man of a peculiarly bold and ardent mind, who often reproved kings for their wickedness, and made the most audacious of their emissaries to tremble before him, fleeing to the wilderness from the vengeance of Jezebel, and while he sat under a juniper-tree re-

* Job ii. 10.; iii. 11—13.

sting for himself that he might die, and saying,—
it is enough now, O Lord, take away my life; for
m not better than my fathers."*

But it is our duty to endure to the end, to manifest
ame submission to the Divine will, after strug-
gling for years with poverty, as when we were first
brought low, and the same patience in the agonies of
h as in the first assault of sickness. He is not
ely truly, but eminently patient, who can sit
vn with as much contentment to the fare of pover-
is he did to that of affluence, and who can bear the
ility of friends as well as that of those who never
ated him with kindness. Say not, "Who is suf-
ent for these things? It is too much for human
nature, it is a hard saying, Who can bear it;" for the
grace which is promised is suitable and efficacious.
It is no sign that our inability is felt in a right way
when the idea of it restrains us from every effort; for
then only is the consciousness of it true humility,
when it makes us more diligent in the use of the
means of grace, and more earnest in our solicitations
for it. When we think what grace doth in conver-
sion, we cannot question its power in improving and
perfecting any holy principle.

III. I shall now illustrate the motive to this con-
duct which the text suggests. We cannot suppose
that the Apostle meant to assert, in this expression,
the possibility of attaining perfection in holiness in
the present state, or that a high and persevering pa-

* 1 Kings xix. 4.

tience constitutes this perfection. When we hear from Job such words as these,—"Behold, I am vile," and from Paul such a statement as this,—"In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,"—we must consider the language of those who speak of their having attained a freedom from all sin as the cant of ignorance, folly, and presumption.

Attention to the state of the primitive Christians will lead us to the true import of the Apostle's language. Their faith in the gospel and their attachment to its Author were strong; they had enabled them to overcome prejudices in favour of the Jewish religion which they had long fondly cherished, and had led them from ceremonies which they once valued as the grounds of their acceptance with God to a humble reliance on the cross. They had enabled them to relinquish the esteem and the kindness of their bigoted countrymen, which had formerly been their solace amidst the neglect and the indignities of the heathen, and to unite themselves with the followers of the Lord Jesus in spiritual worship and in pure benevolence. Now, as to these principles, they might be ready to imagine that they constituted the whole of the Christian character; but, though essential parts of it, more was still requisite. Patience was a grace which it was necessary they should cultivate most assiduously. It is a principal feature in the character of Christ. This is intimated in the descriptions given of him by the prophets,—"He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor make his voice to be heard in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and a smoking flax shall he not quench. He was oppressed, and he

was afflicted; yet he opened not his mouth: he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."* This was intimated in his own descriptions of his character, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." It is exhibited in every part of the narrative of his life and of his sufferings; and never were pages written more fitted to exhibit the beauty of this grace, or to win the heart to the practice of it, than those which detail the last hours of the Redeemer.

Now, they were not to imagine themselves conformed to the image of God's Son while possessed only of a small measure of this grace. The carnal Jews, who gloried in their relation to Moses, showed no solicitude for that meekness in which he stood unrivalled under the former economy; but Christians were not to suppose, that such inconsistency could be allowed among the disciples of Jesus. His eminence in this grace required a corresponding eminence in them.

This was a principle peculiarly necessary to the consistent and uniform support of the Christian profession in the stormy periods in which they lived. Had they wanted it, they would have been like the pilgrim without his staff in a rough and slippery path, or like the vessel without its anchor on a dangerous shore.

In this motive the Apostle may be considered as intimating the influence of patience in securing and improving the other graces of religion. It keeps the

* Is. xlii. 2, 3.; liii. 7.

shield of faith firm on the breast, and the fire of love flaming in the heart. It keeps the hands of prayer from falling down, and the song of praise from becoming cold or careless. It is the best disposition for searching the deep things of God, and for the perusal of those parts of the Bible where our faults are condemned. It keeps watchfulness at its post and contentment at its lesson. It preserves us from casting away our confidence, and rejoicing of hope, which hath so great a recompense of reward; maintains temperance firm amidst all the solicitations of others and all the wishes of our own hearts, and supports repentance in those feelings of abasement and in that course of mortification by which godly sorrow works to salvation.

Where patience hath its perfect work it hath as powerful an influence on happiness as on goodness. No anxiety can harass and no despair cloud the heart where it rules. Happiness does not depend on our possession of the materials of enjoyment (for with all these a man may be miserable); but it depends on the state of the mind and on the dispositions of the heart. With a contented mind, and a patient spirit, a man will be happy whatever he may want, whatever he may suffer. In proportion to our attainments in these graces will be our attainments in felicity. How many errors may not this statement correct in our schemes, efforts, and prayers for happiness!

These remarks apply with peculiar force to aged Christians. High attainments in this grace may be expected from you. Long is the course of discipline under which God hath kept you for your improve-

in it, and many of the hinderances, which per-
in youth and manhood experience in the exercise
his grace, do not impede you. Ye have felt the
s of affliction, and may now be expected to
rify God in the fire; ye have felt the misery of
ention and revenge, and may now be expected to
quiet and gentle; you are about to give account
urselves to God, and is it not fit that you should
r to stand complete in all his will? Your friends
bound to bear with your infirmities and weak-
much more respectable and happy will it
r you and for them, if your contentment
eekness be such as that you make no claims on
forbearance, and are no hinderance to their joy.
aged saint, thus perfect in patience, hath the life
God amidst the decays of nature, and the peace of
heaven in the days of evil.

CONCLUSION.

In concluding this discourse, I shall give you a few counsels to aid you in the cultivation of this principle.

Be frequent in your prayers to the God of patience, that he may confirm you to the end. Let the prayer of Paul for the Colossians be your request for yourselves,—"That you may be strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, to all long-suffering and patience with joyfulness." While worldly men pray for the removal of affliction, good men pray for grace to bear it patiently; and while the aged, who are strangers to piety, fret under infirmities which must be borne, the Christian is thankful that

they are so alleviated to him, and that he can obtain mercy and find grace to help him in the time of need.

Study with care the character of Jesus, and especially his patience. The character of the Saviour is altogether lovely. Fancy can conceive nothing so beautiful as his purity, and nothing so sweet as his gentleness and benignity. Behold the Lamb of God, and, whatever your temptations to impatience are, you will find an answer to them in the life of Jesus. Are you ready to fret that you have such difficulties to struggle with in your endeavours to promote the spiritual welfare of your connexions? Think of Christ's gentleness with the froward, his condescension to the simple, and his long-suffering with the perverse. Are you ready to fret that you meet with so many indignities in an inoffensive and beneficent life? Think of him who found insult and injury in every scene to which he went in mercy. Are you ready to fret that you have not a more comfortable bed on which to repose after the labours of a toilsome day? Consider, that thy bed of chaff and straw is better than the sides of the ship on which Christ lay down. Are you ready to fret that you have not more of the comforts of God's presence? Think of him who died forsaken. And are you ready to fret at the thought that your last days are likely to be imbittered by indigence and pain and the company of the worthless? Think of him who died on a cross betwixt two thieves.

Converse frequently with your companions in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. You should state your sorrows to each other,

o give vent to a querulous temper, but to solicit n presenting such considerations as may animate olution and confirm your fortitude. How sad , when men find in their families, when they detail losses and the indignities they have met with, au- rs who encourage their fretfulness and excite their enge, instead of softening the rancour of irritated de and the bitterness of disappointed hope!

arch the Scriptures daily. The Bible is the of Christ's patience. There you will see a lly company who, through faith and patience, in- t he promises, and there the most animating es are presented to excite you to follow them. ss thy law had been my delight my soul had ished in mine affliction. Here patience finds the m which she drops into the wounds of the heart, staff by which she supports the weary pilgrim, light by which she guides through a dark place, and the pillow which she lays beneath the aching head.

Think on the lustre which this will shed on the religion you profess. This has been one of the boasts of philosophy, that it has made men superior to the evils of life, and nothing will degrade Christianity more, in the estimation of such men, than a querulous temper in its followers. Let your conduct therefore be such, that the ministers of Christ will say of you as Paul does of the Thessalonians,—"We ourselves glory in you in the churches of Christ, for your patience and faith in all the tribulations and persecutions which ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may

be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye suffer."*

Think on the approbation which Christ will express of the perfect work of patience; he will whisper to your hearts his gracious message to the church of Thyatira,—"I know thy works, and thy charity, and service, and thy faith, and thy patience; and thy last works to be more than the first."† And at the day of judgment he will confess you before his Father and before the angels. He will then confess you as the possessors of passive graces, tried and perfected in suffering, peculiar in heaven to himself and you. And consider, that the time is at hand when God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes, and when Christ shall present his followers to his Father a glorious church, nor having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

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* 2 Thes. i. 4, 5. † Rev. ii. 19.

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE LAST WARNING.

DANIEL v. 25—28. *And this is the writing that was written, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Peres; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.*

HISTORY records various premonitions which have been given to men of their approaching fate. In some cases they were the result of malignant artifice, in others the suggestions of faithful friendship. In some cases they were delivered by the oracles of superstition; in others, the presentiment has been supposed to arise from the influence of the divine Spirit; and in not a few it was the gloomy foreboding of a disordered imagination and of a fearful heart. Such presages have confounded the sagacity of the wise and paralyzed the arm of the brave, and they have produced that inaction, feebleness, and despair, which have secured their fulfilment.

The most famous instance of such premonitions, which is to be found in profane history, is that given to Brutus. When the army which he commanded was about to march into Greece to fight for the freedom of his country, as he sat alone in his tent by a

dim light and at a late hour, and while the whole army was sleeping around him, he was surprised by the sudden appearance of a terrible spectre by his side. He asked, What art thou, God or man, and what is thy business with me? To which the phantom replied, "I am thy evil genius, Brutus, and thou shalt meet me at Philippi!" At that place, Brutus, in shame and despair after defeat, fell upon his sword and died.

How striking is the resemblance betwixt this man's warning and fate, and that of Saul, king of Israel! When that unhappy man went to inquire of a woman that had a familiar spirit, as to the result of his approaching conflict with the Philistines, the form of Samuel rose before him, and thus addressed him:—"The Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy; and hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David. Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines; and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."* If we pass on to Mount Gilboa we shall see Saul perishing by his own hand, after witnessing the discomfiture of his army and the slaughter of his sons.

In the words of our text, we have a warning addressed to a guilty monarch, in a manner too open and public to be ascribed to delusion on his part, or to imposture on that of others,—a warning which silenced in a moment the roar of impious mirth, which no soothsayer pretended to explain, which

* 1 Sam. xxviii. 18, 19.

Daniel laid open in all its terrible import, and which the transactions of the succeeding night did most fully and fatally realize. This is a passage rich in instruction, and may we all learn from it not to be high-minded, but to fear.

In this discourse I shall make some remarks explanatory of this warning, and shall then illustrate some of the important lessons which it suggests.

I. In making some remarks explanatory of this vision, I observe, in the first place, that it was an intimation to Belshazzar of the termination of his reign. It announced to him, not merely a calamity by which his throne might be shaken, or a banishment and captivity from which he might return, and resume his power, but its final close. His courtiers had flattered him with the assurance of a long and prosperous reign; and this was a hope he had fondly cherished and proudly maintained; but now he is told that his reign was come to an end, and should be terminated in his destruction. This was not directly expressed, but it was implied in the warning. At that period the sparing of the lives of captive princes was rare, and the establishment of a new dynasty was thought to be most effectually secured by the slaughter of all the connexions of the old. The doubling of this word intimated the absolute certainty of the predicted ruin. In this warning, too, it was intimated, that his kingdom should be given to the rivals whom he hated, whose siege of his capital he had hitherto resisted with success, and whose power and skill he had lately so presumptuously defied. This is a cir-

cumstance which has often imbittered the last hours of falling greatness, that its honours should adorn the head of a rival, and that they should enjoy those scenes of delight which they had prepared for themselves. Such was the intimation which was made to Saul, when he was told that David, the object of his jealousy and hatred, should succeed him in the throne from which he was to be cast down in disgrace and ruin. Whatever the world may say to flatter the prosperous in their course, it hath no anticipations to encourage them in its close.

2. In this warning of Belshazzar there is an intimation of Jehovah's estimate of the worthlessness of his character: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and thou art found wanting." In these words there is supposed to be an allusion to a custom which long prevailed in some kingdoms of the East, of weighing the monarch in a balance, in the presence of his grandees, on the return of his birth-day. A traveller mentions his being present at a scene of this kind, and says,—"That the scales in which the king was weighed were plated with gold, and so was the beam on which they hung, by great chains, made likewise of that precious metal. The king, sitting in one of them, was weighed first against silver, then was he weighed against gold, and after that against jewels, laid in silken bags, on the contrary scale. By his weight, of which the physicians keep yearly an exact account, they presume to guess the present state of his body, of which they speak flatteringly, however they think it to be."

But we must understand this part of the warning, not merely as an intimation from Heaven that he was

near to death, in opposition to the flattering assurances of length of days which he was accustomed to receive from his physicians, but that, in opposition to the eulogies heaped on him as if he was the best of kings, Jehovah declared him destitute of all true excellence, and charged him with the grossest wickedness. He had fancied himself superior to all human control. No voice of censure had ever reached his ear; nor was he aware that his subjects of all ranks looked to him with any other feelings than those of unmingled admiration. Now he is told that the omniscient God had marked all his feelings, and schemes, and conduct; that to him he was responsible, and must quickly give an account; and that, whatever he might think of himself, in the long-cherished presumption of his heart, the Ruler of the World had condemned him as a sinner, whose transgressions were aggravated by the station he had disgraced, and by the mercies which he had abused.

3. In this warning the connexion betwixt his sins and his punishment is strongly marked. It is placed in the middle of it, to intimate, that for his wickedness were these judgments denounced, and that it was this which was hurrying him to ruin. God doth neither threaten nor punish, as man sometimes does, from caprice, but from the dictates of strict and impartial justice; and while earthly monarchs have sometimes punished without assigning any reasons, and in other cases upon false accusations, God renders to every man according to his deeds. In the case of sentences and punishments among men, the consciousness of innocence hath sometimes borne up the

sufferer, and lightened the sensations of fear, and pain, and shame: but this cannot be the case with those which proceed from the Judge of all the earth; and while Belshazzar heard this warning, he felt that it was as impossible to repel this charge as to escape this doom. Men in passing sentence sometimes employ strong terms in describing the offender's crime, and in some cases may have used the language of exaggeration, but Jehovah's warnings are expressed with simplicity, and are felt more terrible on that account, as requiring no pomp of words to stamp them with solemnity or to heighten their terror.

4. It was a warning in which no hope of mercy was exhibited. There was not merely no intimation that it was possible, by any particular course, to escape the impending destruction, but no direction was given how his soul might be saved from the wrath to come. In various warnings of Scripture we find this expressed; but in this one there is not the least gleam of salvation. When Daniel had interpreted the dream to his grandfather, he concluded thus: "O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity;"* but he gave no exhortation of this kind to Belshazzar; for he was aware that for him there was no hope. But it may be said, Why was this warning given if his case was desperate? To this it may be answered, that it was an open testimony of the displeasure of Jehovah at the contempt

* Dan. iv. 27.

which had been manifested to his name and worship, and was adapted to make the strongest impression in favour of the true religion on the successful besiegers.

In the warning given to Saul there was no admonition to repentance, and in Christ's warnings to Judas he holds not up to him the least idea of mercy. When he foretold to Peter his shameful fall, he said to him, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren;" but to Judas he saith, "The Son of man goeth, as it is written of him: but wo to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born."* There are persons still who, by their audacious contempt of holy and merciful admonitions and restraints, have so provoked God, that for them "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

5. It was the last warning which Belshazzar received. He had received many admonitions already, in the various references which had been made before him to the signal chastisement of his grandfather; in the rebukes of his own conscience; in the disasters of his reign; in the approach of the enemy that was encamped around his capital; and in the various attempts they made to enter it: but these had all been disregarded. Instead of being humbled, he had become more audacious, and, instead of trembling for his throne and for his life, he had anticipated nothing

* Matt. xxvi. 24.

but the destruction of his enemies, and the extension of his empire. The Monitor, who had long struggled with him, had now written the last sentence, and uttered the last voice of admonition, and he was now abandoned of God to his fate.

6. It was quickly realized in Belshazzar's ruin. Twelve months elapsed betwixt the warning given to Nebuchadnezzar, and his expulsion from human society to all the degradation of wild insanity; but in that very night after this warning was Belshazzar slain. When we think how the respite of twelve months after his warning was of no avail in bringing his grandfather to repentance, we will see no reason to imagine that any delay would have made Belshazzar more wise. When Jonah cried in Nineveh, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" word came to the king, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered himself in sackcloth, and sat in ashes, and called his people to fasting and prayer; and though no intimation of mercy was given in the warning of Jonah, they said, "Who can tell if God will turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" But no such grief was felt, no such mandate was issued by Belshazzar. We see indeed in his conduct to Daniel some indications of honourable feeling. He did not act like Ahab when he gave this order respecting Micaiah, who foretold his defeat and fall at Ramoth-gilead,—"Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction, and with water of affliction, until I return in peace;" but conferred on Daniel the rewards he had promised. If he did this to propitiate

God whom he served, it was the only measure he ted for that purpose, and it was impossible that, r such a warning, he could have much hope of its icacy.

II. Let us now set before you some of the im- nt l sons which this warning suggests.

i ws us, that it is the province of Jehovah t continuance, and to bring to a close the wer of ires. Beyond the period which he hath for their continuance, no wealth, nor skill, nor r. can prolong their existence. He employs in- nts in the subversion of empires, and beyond superficial inquirers never look; but it is Jeho- calls them forth to action, and gives them di- tion and vigour. Is a kingdom overthrown by the rising of its subjects? It is he that loosens them from the restraints which kept their violent passions in awe, and permits them to rush to the most destructive excesses. Is it overthrown by the assaults of potent enemies from without? It is he who summons them to the field, and prepares their way before them.

In speaking of the revolutions of kingdoms, the wise men of this world confine their attention to the oppressions which made the yoke of princes intolerable; to the artifices by which the hearts of subjects were alienated from their rulers; to those habits of luxury which enervated them, and rendered them an easy prey: but let us recollect that these and other causes are guided by his hand who hath wisdom and might for his; who changeth the times and the seasons; who removeth kings, and who setteth up kings. Let

it not be thought that this representation gives a license to rebellion in states, or to their invasion by neighbouring powers. In such scenes men act, not with a view to God's purposes, for they know them not, and have no intention to fulfil them, but from the impulse of their own passions, and an overruling Prodence makes the wrath of man to praise him. Afflicted nations may be comforted by this truth,—Riches are not for ever, neither doth a crown endure to all generations. They may live to hear the cry,—"How hath the oppressor ceased!" or should they die in a land of bondage, their children may be free.

The history of the world presents us with other instances, besides this one in the text, of God's terminating kingdoms and dynasties. Empires, which seemed likely to stand while sun and moon endured, have crumbled down like a house of clay, and not a trace remains that here their palaces stood, their ships rode, or their banners waved. How quickly did the empire of Alexander fall to pieces! His death was the signal for disunion among his generals; and the dominion which had been hastily acquired was as hastily lost. In our own day the empire of France seemed likely to spread its power over the whole continent of Europe, and nation after nation we saw lured by its arts, or subjugated by its arms; nought but Britain remained the opponent of its ambition and rapacity; but how quickly did its influence pass away! Its galling yoke was broken in pieces by the nations over whose necks it was fixed. That nation is now confined to its former limits, and its leader in battle and conquest has perished as an exile and a cap-

tive on a rock in the ocean. "I saw the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green bay tree: he passed, yea, was not: I sought him, but he could not be found."*

2. This warning teaches us, that Providence assigns the power of which it deprives guilty princes to those whom it pleases. Sometimes we behold it seized by the people over whom they ruled, and who, unable to bear the yoke of oppression any longer, throw it at once from their necks, and tell their tyrants that they are determined to be free. It is to be lamented, that in many of the instances in which this convulsion has taken place, popular fury knew not where to stop; and while it cried, "Hew down the tree, cut off its branches, and shake off its fruit," it has torn up the plants around it which promised both shelter and beauty.

In other cases, Providence transfers the empire to the relations of guilty princes, taught by their fall to rule in the fear of God. Such was the happy case in our own country, when the sceptre was taken from the Stuarts,—a race of kings noted for imbecility, duplicity, and the love of arbitrary power,—and placed in the hands of men who have shown themselves the fathers of their people.

At other times, Providence assigns the power to strangers, and to strangers of the lowest degree, but distinguished by captivating address or daring ambition. "This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, to the

* Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36.

intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."* We have seen the throne which was for so many centuries occupied by the Bourbons, and which has been again restored to them, given to a military adventurer of wonderful talent; and imperial splendour shone for a season in a land where the pomp of kings was supposed to be for ever extinguished in their blood. When the crimes of nations call for the vengeance of Heaven, he gives them into the hands of rulers, whose finger is heavier than the loins of those whom they have supplanted. In other cases he drives out the oppressor, and gives them kings to rule them in righteousness and mercy.

3. This warning suggests that God gives various indications of his intention of terminating the power of kings, and of transferring it to others. In this age we are not to expect, as in the case of Belshazzar, a sign from Heaven to indicate that the period for the fall of empires is come, but in many ways is this impression produced in the hearts of princes, and it is legible in the events of Providence. Princes, notwithstanding the flatteries of their courtiers, have been unable to shake off the gloomy apprehension of the decline of their glory. God has awakened in the proud hearts that denied him, the sad forebodings of a falling throne, and of a successful rival rising up in their place. How miserable was a great part of Saul's life as a king through his jealousy of David! In him

* Dan. iv. 17.

he saw one whose accomplishments threw his qualities into the shade, and whose courage, and fame, and prudence were knitting the hearts of all Israel to him. The attempts which he made to destroy David show how much he feared and envied him, and the failure of these attempts aggravated his unhappiness.

In other cases an approaching change is visible in the discontent of the people; in those cabals and murmurs which tell us that a storm is gathering; and in the persisting of rulers in measures which irritate where conciliation is required. Who sees it not in the prevalence of those vices in the great which make them objects of contempt to their inferiors; and in the spread of those luxurious excesses in which every manly sentiment is extinguished and the strength of a land devoured? Who sees it not in the rising prosperity of rival states, advancing in the vigour and enterprise in which others are declining? These are like the hardy plant springing up by the side of the tree which hath begun to decay, which will soon overtop it, and spread its branches over it.

Who that has marked the signs of the times, has not seen indications of public changes in the spread of those infidel notions, by which the pillars which support the peace and order of society are shaken, and all those feelings are extinguished by which men are restrained from crimes. Of such principles many in high places once made their boast, and the lesson they taught has been received and acted on by the lower orders, in a manner which may strike them with shame, regret, and terror. Men, in the presumption and folly of their hearts, may deride such tokens,

assert, that the gloomy lessons which they teach the interpretation of an enthusiasm which delights images of horror; yet doth this verify the assertion of the prophet,—"None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand."* Though the pious may sometimes mistake the plans of Providence, and though God may sometimes repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that a people, or dynasty, do not perish, the return of princes or nations to their former excesses will make the blow fall with more severity than it would have done. Let us mark the signs of the times, not to cherish a croaking spirit of discontent, but to hear the sound of God's steps, when he comes out of his place to punish, and to flee from the wrath to come.

The lessons from the part of the warning which respects the character and conduct of Belshazzar suggest instruction more generally interesting.

4. I remark, therefore, that it teaches us, that there are various methods by which God tries the characters, tempers, and conduct of men. There is the balance of the sanctuary, by which I understand those principles for guiding our opinions, and those rules for directing our conduct, which are laid down in Scripture. The world hath its maxims by which it tries the tempers and actions of men. In its estimation the man given to pleasure is an amiable and liberal character, while the sober and the grave are stigmatized as creatures mean and narrow-minded. In the estimation of the avaricious, the man devoted

* Dan. xii. 10.

[illegible] money is the wisest of men; while he who [illegible] the world is deemed a spendthrift. Religionists, too, are prone to judge of others by certain expressions of feeling and peculiarities of opinion, in which they vainly imagine the power of godliness consists, without an enlightened appeal to the authority of Scripture, and in contempt of the dictates of charity. These are the balances of caprice and selfishness, and those who are tried in them may well complain of the injustice they meet with, and say with Job,—"Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity." Such an even balance is the word of God. To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them. The sentiments which accord with the Divine word, however they may be condemned as irrational and illiberal, and the practice which adorns it, though censured as too strict and gloomy for human nature, will be honoured with God's approbation, and held out as proving us to be Christ's disciples indeed.

There is the balance of conscience. To this faculty God hath assigned the office of judging of men's thoughts, words, and actions. In some cases it performs this duty in a careless manner. Sometimes the eyes are heavy with sleep, and it cannot mark accurately how the balance inclines, nor the things which are put into the opposite scales; sometimes it is imposed on by the artful representations of a deceitful heart, and gives its approbation to actions which it ought most decidedly to condemn; but its decisions often accord with what is just and true. The sinner

is conscious of this; and there is nothing he feels more reluctant to than to be examined by it. If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God; and if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things. In vain does the world applaud if conscience condemn. The voice of the world reaches not the retreats of the closet, and is not heard in the silence of the midnight hour; but then conscience speaks, and with a voice which strikes the heart with terror.

There is the balance of Providence, by the events of which astonishing discoveries are sometimes made of the real tempers and characters of men, and they are found quite different from what they were supposed to be both by themselves and others. How many a man has prosperity shown to be in heart haughty and cruel! In low circumstances he appeared modest and obliging; solicitous for the comfort of his neighbours in sorrow, and loud in his complaints of the neglect and the oppression of those who are at ease. He is unexpectedly advanced in the world; his humility is laid aside, and he rules his dependants with a rod of iron. Adversity hath made discoveries equally mortifying. Many who in prosperity were disposed to be satisfied with every event which befel them, and felt no anxiety about the future, have discovered, under misfortunes, a fretful and irritable mind, practise meannesses they once affected to abhor, and seek relief by methods by no means accordant with honourable principles. God led his ancient people forty years in the wilderness to humble them, and to prove them, and to see what was in their

hearts, whether they would keep his commandments or no.

And there is the balance of judgment. God hath appointed a day in which he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. This is the final trial of man; it is so strict in itself, so solemn in its circumstances, and so tremendous in its consequences as to many, that the heart of David misgave him when he thought of it, and he said,—"Enter not into judgment with me, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."* An unfavourable decision may be given against us after the three preceding trials, yet, while the day of salvation lasts, still there is hope; but if condemned at this bar we are lost for ever. Men may banish the thought of this trial from their minds, and may assert, that the terrors of the Lord are the dark colourings of fancy; but if we are wise we shall listen to the voice which speaks to us from heaven,—"Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his works shall be."†

5. There are various persons who, when thus tried, shall be found wanting. The scrutiny is universal. There is none on earth so mighty as to resist it, and none too insignificant to escape it. Every man under the guilt and power of sin shall have this sentence announced to him, to whatever class in society he belongs, and in whatever age of the world he may live. But it will be more useful to select some who shall thus be pronounced slothful and

* Psalm cxliii. 2. † Rev. xxii. 12.

wicked; and I shall specify them, not as if the condemnation of the rest was uncertain, but because they flatter themselves in their own eyes till their iniquity is found to be hateful. I mention first the dissolute man, because of the similarity of his character to that of Belshazzar. Nothing tends so much to subvert all moral principle and feeling in the heart as the practice of debauchery. Persons addicted to it regard their trespasses as venial, and think that God is too indulgent to punish them severely. They imagine that their honesty and their charities will incline the scale in their favour; but the Bible tells us, that they who are in the flesh cannot please God; that to be carnally-minded is death; and that whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Conscience, in a serious hour, lifts up its voice against their enormities, while the hand of injured innocence and youth, seduced by them, points to the vengeance of eternal fire. At such seasons the pleas they once deemed so plausible now appear utterly frivolous, and he feels himself an accursed wretch who was once the life of the gay circle. And when God rises up what shall he say? His liberalities will then appear thoughtless profusion, and his pleasurable indulgences the gratification of the lowest appetites.

The formalist is another who shall be found wanting. Such are the false impressions which this man hath of his own character, that he thinks himself a favourite of Heaven. "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Judah with deceits; the balances of deceit are in his hand." Imagining that the whole of religion lies in the observance of its or-

dinances, and in external purity of manners, he is satisfied that all is well, and says,—"God, I thank thee I am not as other men are;" but the Bible tells us, that he only is a Jew who is one inwardly, and that true circumcision is that of the heart. Conscience, in the hour of serious inquiry, tells him that he hath neither part nor lot in this matter, for his heart is not right in the sight of God. And when he stands in judgment, how will he abide the search of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire? The man who boasted of his zeal for the Lord will be found wanting in the charity which is the end of the commandment. He who vaunted of his sobriety will be seen deficient in holy affections; and he who valued himself on being a faithful attendant in the sanctuary will be seen to have had a heart that went after its covetousness. The whited sepulchre is then thrown open, and what seemed at a distance the mansion of beauty, sweetness, and order, will be found full of all uncleanness.

The merely moral man is another of whom this estimate shall be made. There are many who, though they live in the utter neglect of the duties they owe to God, hope to be saved on account of the strict attention which they pay to the claims of truth, justice, and charity. In the opinion of many, this is deemed the whole duty of man; and where it is to be seen, the absence of all religious principle is hardly thought worthy of regret. But try such a man by the first and great commandment, requiring supreme love to God, and how crimina. does he appear! When conscience is awakened, this is its language to him,—

"The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified;" and how will such a man stand the scrutiny of judgment! In vain does the epitaph celebrate him as the friend of the poor, the hospitable neighbour, and the man of integrity; the verdict of Heaven hath already pronounced him the enemy of God, and of the noblest interests of humanity, and that verdict shall be declared before assembled worlds. These two questions are sufficient to expose the idle rant which extols the sufficiency of morality,—"If I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?"*

I shall only mention one character more, and that is the man of false principles. Principles the most opposite to revelation as to its leading doctrines have been adopted, and extolled by ignorance and impiety as the fruits of liberal and enlightened inquiry, and the prejudices of superstition have been represented as falling before them; but, amidst these vain and blasphemous plaudits, the conscience of the man on whom they are heaped has accused him of fighting against God, and while they tell him of the high place his speculations have raised him to in the temple of fame, it bids him prepare for shame and everlasting contempt. And shall such a man stand in the judgment? His boasted speculations shall be laughed to scorn, and his scoffs shall come like venom into his bowels and like fire into his bones.

With regard to those who, though connected with

* Malachi i. 6.

Christ by faith, have mixed unsound opinions with the truth as it is in him, the Apostle tells us, that the fire shall try every man's work; and that while such errors shall be subverted, he shall be saved, yet so as by fire;* that is, through many anxieties, terrors, and perils, which he shall escape who was kept from such delusion.

6. There are various modes and seasons in which God intimates to the sinner, even in the present life, his estimate of his character. He does this in exposing his true character to the knowledge and the detestation of his fellow-creatures; and how horrible is public shame and infamy, when it is considered as an expression of the secret abhorrence of the Judge of all! It is seldom that the most artful hypocrite dies undetected; and that sentence may strike him with horror amidst all his efforts for the concealment of his wickedness,—"Be sure your sin will find you out."†

He does this in calamities and judgments, which are manifest indications of his displeasure, and evident tokens of perdition. No sophistry of the sinner can construe them into fortuitous events, into afflictions common to man, or into the salutary discipline of a father. Nay, sometimes God does this when the sinner is on the summit of prosperity. While the rich man contemplated in fancy his barns filled with plenty, and the thousands of gold and silver they would yield him, a hand wrote on the wall the awful words,—"Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be re-

* 1 Cor. iii. 15. † Numb. xxxii. 23.

quired of thee; then whose shall all these things be which thou hast provided?"*

He does this in the destruction which he brings on sinners around them in their sins, and in the exposure of their wickedness. In such sad events the sinner is made to read his own character, and to hear his own doom. He does this also by the convictions of guilt, and the terrors of impending misery, which he works in them by his Spirit. These convictions are so powerful, that no efforts which can be made by the sinner, or by others, can repel the conclusions which they force on the heart. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set thy transgressions in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

He does this in the melancholy reflections of old age on a life spent without God, and closing without hope. Amidst the lonely days of that period, life passes under review; its transactions are seen stript of every palliation; and in every thing by which man's last season is embittered, he feels compelled to say,—"Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." How affectingly are those dark reflections of the aged exhibited in the 90th Psalm,—"Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in

* Luke xii. 20.

thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

And He often intimates this estimate of the sinner's character to him on his death-bed. Amidst the agonies of the last hour a hand is stretched down, and it spreads the roll of a book before him, and there is written within and without lamentation, and mourning, and wo. Oh! what cries have despair and fear sent forth from the bed of death! That bed has been shaken with the sinner's strong convulsions, and its pillow has been watered with tears. Every suggestion of peace only adds to the horror with which this intimation confounds the heart.

7. There is something very solemn and awful about such intimations. There are various considerations which evince this to be the case. Were it merely the expression of human opinion it might be despised, but it is his verdict in whose hand our final destiny rests. Whatever the instruments may be by which the communication is made, it is felt to proceed from him who is mighty in strength and terrible in working. When God gives the commission to imagination, conscience, fear, or affliction, to intimate this, as much horror may be awakened in the soul as if an angel brought the message with a countenance like lightning.

It is often unexpected. Little did Belshazzar ima-

gine that such an intimation was approaching. In the eye of fancy he beheld his enemies retiring from the siege of Babylon, public applause placing new crowns on his head, and a long career of prosperity and glory opening before him. Little did the man who had gone to the feast without the wedding-garment imagine, that on that day he was to be exposed and punished. None of the servants or guests appear to have challenged him; and he flattered himself that the Master of the feast was too kind to be offended with him, and too patient to rebuke or exclude him,—but mark the issue! When the king came in to see the guests, he was the first object he marked, and the first whom he accosted. "He saith unto him, Friend, how comest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* This intimation has reached the sinner's ear at the moment when the voice of flattery was loudest, and hope was drawing the fairest pictures of protracted enjoyment.

How solemn is the thought, that this intimation may seal our perdition! Impressions of guilt and forebodings of wrath are sometimes produced in the heart, in order to excite men to flee to Christ as their hope and refuge. These are the preludes of conversion. I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came sin revived, and I died; but

* Matt. xxii. 11—13.

ar day of grace is over, God swears in his at we shall never enter into his rest. When character has been pronounced infamous, and been sentenced to die, he may receive a pardon, v, by subsequent good conduct, obtain an honame; but God is of one mind, and who ... him? And the denial of all grace leaves the er hardened in wickedness. He will be the more ving of misery the longer he endures it.

only add, that this intimation may be quickly ved by the sinner's ruin; by the destruction of is hopes and of all his temporal advantages; by loss of his life, and by the perdition of his soul. that being often reproved, and hardeneth his ck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. In his invitations, and entreaties, and expostulations, Jehovah gives line upon line, but in this intimation his language is decisive and final. Now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

CONCLUSION.

How much is it to be desired, that the lessons of this scene should be pondered by the rulers and the judges of the earth! Let them bow before Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. Let them stand in awe, and not sin. Let it not be said a palace is not a place for caution, nor is a throne a seat for fear; for there is more need of watchfulness and prayer in this lot than in that of the poor. Happ will it be if princes are taught not by dire experienc,

but by the influence of Divine grace, to say with Nebuchadnezzar,—"Now I praise, and honour, and extol the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."* The best foundation they can lay for their throne is in the love of their people. Let them not despise this, and trust to the wisdom of their counsellors, the discipline of their armies, or the equipment of their fleets. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host. May the convulsions we have seen in Europe teach princes to seek the stability of their thrones by ruling in justice and mercy; and the people to bear with patience hardships which may mingle with their blessings, instead of seeking their removal by bloody changes. Monarchs should consider, that at death their reign shall certainly be finished, that another hand shall hold their sceptre, and another head wear their crown. Death can find its way as easily into the palace as into the cottage, and can draw aside the purple hangings of the bed of state as readily as it approaches the poor man on his straw. Let them anticipate that call,—"Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou must be no longer steward;" and let them labour to prepare those who shall succeed them for ruling in the fear of God.

How similar to that of Belshazzar was the character and sudden exit of Charles the Second in England!—a monarch whose debaucheries were copied in the licentiousness of his subjects, and whose cruel persecutions the flatterer attempts to excuse, and the

* Dan. iv. 37.

bigot to vindicate in vain. "This suddenness in his fate," says Evelyn in his Diary, "might well create awful feelings in those who had witnessed the life he continued to lead, till the stroke of death arrested him. I saw this evening such a scene of profuse gaming, and luxurious dallying and profaneness in the palace, as I had never before witnessed." A week after he assisted at the proclamation of his successor, and thus records his feelings:—"I can never forget the luxury and profaneness, gaming and all dissoluteness, and, as it were, total forgetfulness of God, it being Sabbath evening which, this day se'ennight, I was witness to, the king dallying with his mistresses, a French boy singing wanton songs to amuse them, and a number of the courtiers in deep play round a gaming-table. Six days after all was in the dust."

But all ranks of people should listen to the instructions which are taught them by this scene. Let not any say, I shall never be moved, I shall never be in adversity. The close of your prosperity may be drawing nigh; the trade which is now supporting your family so respectably may quickly pass away to another, and your vigorous health be succeeded by pining sickness. And death is at hand. The comforts you now call your own will soon acknowledge another for their master; and the nest in which you say you shall die may be torn down by the tempest, and your last breath rise from the bare earth or the cold stone. Mark every intimation which God gives you of the solemn change. You see that wise men die, and the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth and their lands to others; and do not

you feel the sentence in yourselves, in your sensations of languor, and in the decline of your strength? The end of your life, the end of all things, is at hand as to you; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. Let your hold of the world be slight, and your separation from it will give no shock to your hearts.

Let good men receive the consolation which is imparted to them by this subject, however gloomy it may appear. Whatever disasters may happen, the kindness of God shall not depart from you, and with your joy a stranger cannot intermeddle. The righteousness which adorns you may be given to another, but it shall not be taken from you; the peace which solaces you may be imparted to others, but it shall still keep your heart through Christ Jesus; the ministers of religion shall soon be enjoined to say to you, that your warfare is accomplished; and your hearts shall exclaim, I have fought a good fight! Your earthly possessions you shall leave to others, but your true riches you shall take with you to heaven, and there you shall reign in life for ever. In you there is found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, and ye are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power. Christ "hath blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances which was against you, taken it out of the way, and nailed it to his cross."* Even now God will accomplish to you his gracious assurance,—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna; and I will give him the white stone, and in it the new name,

* Col. ii. 14.

[illegible] knoweth but him that *receiveth it*."* [illegible] judgment will be thus expressed to you.—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And your prayers and your alms he will mention as evidences that you have not received his grace in vain. Let this prospect excite you to "add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, charity; for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh those things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."† Regard not the censures of men when conscience tells you they are unmerited; and let your character be such, that, like the Apostle, you can thus comfort yourselves—"It is a small matter for me to be judged of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord."

Let ungodly men be afraid. Make not the terrors of judgment the subject of your mirth. Mock not, lest your bands be made strong. A sinner is never nearer the sentence of destruction, than when he makes light of the inspection, the control, and the vengeance of Heaven. Let none suppress the serious thoughts which may have been awakened within him, but with fear and trembling let every sinner work out his salvation. A sword more terrible than that which slew Belshazzar is whetting against you, and the second death, with all its horrors, is preparing for you.

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the temple, after it had been polluted by the idolatries and impieties of Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria; and though it was appointed only by human authority, Christ showed a respect for it, and came from Galilee to observe it, even though it was in the midst of winter. While some treat with contempt every religious service, which, however warranted by general principles, has no express sanction in Scripture, our Lord honoured every institution favourable to gratitude and piety. While this conduct gives no sanction to the needless and burdensome requirements of superstition, and to the observance of days consecrated to the memory of saints, it teaches us to beware of that licentious boldness which contemns seasons pregnant with salutary admonitions, and which bring before the mind the excellent things which God hath done.

How easily might Jesus have excused himself, if he had so pleased, from attendance on this occasion, on account of the distance and the season! But he felt that it became him to fulfil all righteousness. Discouragements which damped the zeal of others seemed only to stimulate his. In his momentous course he had no pause, and no wish for indolence. The crowd collected on this occasion presented to him a sphere for pious instruction which he wished to improve; and the character given of the Messiah in the ancient prophecies he felt solicitous to realize; "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest."

Having made these remarks on the direct reference

of the words of the text, I intend in this discourse to point your attention to some of the lessons which winter teaches us, and to some of the exercises to which it peculiarly calls us. The Saviour hath sanctioned such a use of natural objects by his own example, and it gives to the instructions of religion beauty and interest. It is true, that to the word of Christ our chief attention should be directed; but the volume of nature contains many interesting pages, and much which may illustrate and enforce the dictates of the Gospel.

I. Let us then consider some of the lessons which winter teaches us.

1. It calls us to trace the agency of God in its approach. That the Almighty established a certain order of nature at first, and then left it to operate without any farther interference, is an opinion which accords as little with enlightened reason as with Scripture. Dependence is inseparable from the state and character of a creature; and the support and guidance of the universe are necessary acts in Him who is its governor. The consciousness of his agency works in every human breast; even the rudest savage owns supreme power in the stupendous scenes which nature sometimes exhibits, and the idea of his constant, wise, and beneficent operation is felt as the impulse to pious trust and to meek submission. The language of Scripture on this head is clear and positive,—"By him all things consist, and he upholds all things by the word of his power."

There are various passages of Scripture in which

his agency in winter is asserted, "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow; or hast thou seen the chambers of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of battle, against the day of battle and war? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoar frost of Heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. He giveth snow like wool, and scattereth hoar-frost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can live amidst its cold?"* Owing to the general mildness of the climate of Judea, there are fewer allusions to the scenes and appearances of winter, than of other seasons; but there is a sufficient number to satisfy us, that holy men of old adored the Omnipotence which desolates and renews, which forms the light, and which creates darkness. The Almighty speaks to us in the singing of the birds, and in the gentle breeze of the summer; but he speaks to us also in the roar of the boisterous wind, and in the rattling of the great hail of his strength, and his language is this,—"Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."

The robe of white which covers the fields in winter is spread by his hand, as well as the green mantle of summer. It is the same hand which clothes the trees with leaves so fresh, and blossoms so beautiful, which strips them bare. Praise the Lord, fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling his word. In these words the stormy elements are spoken of as the minis-

* Job xxxviii. 22, 23—29, 30. Psalm cxlvii. 16, 17.

ters of Deity who bear his message and do his pleasure, as well as the sweet light, the gentle breezes, and the soft dew. It is by his appointment that our winters are mild or severe, of longer or shorter continuance. The prognostications of men regarding them are often disappointed, and their failure should teach us, without solicitude, to leave all in God's hands, and to believe that the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land shall yield her increase; righteousness shall go before him, and shall set us in the way of his steps.

2. Winter gives us many striking displays of the care of the Divine goodness. Consider what it doth to the lower animals. To many of them it seems, at first view, a period of suffering and misery. It may be asked, what is to become of the fishes when the streams, in which they used to play, are frozen? Or of the fowls of the air, when not a blade of grass can be found by them for food, and neither trees nor shrubs can afford them the smallest shelter? To this it may be replied, that though winter should be a period of misery to some of them, this is to be imputed, not to the benevolent Creator, but to the wilful apostacy of man; "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same."* That man subjects himself, and all connected with him, or who depend on him, to misery by his sin, is the appointment of Heaven; and it displays the wisdom, justice, and

* Romans viii. 20.

goodness of the Lord of all. It is the ordained restraint of human passion, and the appointed chastisement of human folly.

But it may also be said, that the bounty of Heaven is most evidently displayed to many of them at this period. Many of the fishes repair to the ocean, and others of them to deep pools and rivers, where they are sheltered and cherished till spring returns. It is of the fishes David saith,—"These all wait on thee."

And multitudes of the birds migrate into warmer climates till the return of spring calls them back; others of them, rising above the fear of man, approach his dwelling and barn-yards, and cast themselves on his mercy. This is the case with those of them which, at other seasons, are most shy and timorous. There are some ravenous creatures which the severity of winter forces to approach villages, and to attack men and tame animals; but such occurrences are rare. The creatures which owe nothing to man are as amply provided for as those for whom he cares. Many of them, like the ant, are led by that Providence which disdains not to act as its guide, overseer, and ruler, to provide their meat in the summer, and to gather their food in the harvest. Many of them are lulled to sleep in ruinous buildings, in caves of the earth, and in hollow places of the rocks, and remain in this state till Providence opens their eyes again by the hand of the spring.

As to those of them which do perish, they have lived for the period which their Creator allotted to them; and the termination of existence is not embittered by reflections on the past, or apprehensions as

which no man knoweth but him that receiveth it."* The sentence of judgment will be thus expressed to you:—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" and your prayers and your alms he will mention as evidences that you have not received his grace in vain. Let this prospect excite you to "add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, charity; for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh those things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."† Regard not the censures of men when conscience tells you they are unmerited; and let your character be such, that, like the Apostle, you can thus comfort yourselves,—"It is a small matter for me to be judged of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord."

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DISCOURSE XV.

THE LESSONS AND DUTIES OF WINTER.

JOHN x. 22. *And it was winter.*

THE Evangelists mark with care the places and the seasons of our Lord's discourses and miracles. A general statement of these would have been regarded by some as warranting suspicion as to the truth of the narrative, and it would have been said, that this mode of detail was chosen to prevent that inquiry which would have detected imposture; but this history is so conducted, that a reference could be made to a multitude of witnesses for the reality of its most remarkable incidents. The discourses are stated to have been delivered in the hearing of multitudes in cities and districts, some of whom might easily have been brought forward to assert, that no such discourses were heard if the account of them was untrue; and the persons said to have been healed by the Saviour were known by many as labouring under incurable maladies; and they had it in their power effectually to expose the narrators of the miracles, by pointing to the miserable patients, if still diseased. Thus John tells us, that the place where our Lord delivered the discourse contained in this chapter was Jerusalem, and that it was at the feast of dedication, which was celebrated in winter. This was a feast instituted by Judas Maccabæus on his having purified

can efface from the virtuous heart; for such regions their constitutions are adapted; in the labours of the chase they find health and pleasure, and from the animals they destroy they obtain warm clothing by day and a comfortable bed by night. From them too they obtain oil to cheer their dwellings through their long night; and these lamps shine on happier beings than the silver or crystal chandeliers which illuminate the palaces of pleasure. What a blessing is the moon in every country during the winter! but it shines with peculiar lustre in regions from which the sun is absent for months, and there are various lights which are spread over the sky by which the gloom of that season is enlivened. The return of the sun is the hour of rapture, and the burst of vegetation seems like enchantment. What can be an object more sublime than mountains of ice increasing in height, exhibiting such a variety by the freezing of the spray, and presenting to the imagination the most varied forms of grandeur or beauty! Such too is the state of the atmosphere, that it is adapted for exhibiting the light of the sun above the horizon several days sooner, and retaining it longer, than would otherwise be the case.

Let us think how God hath gladdened such regions by the gospel, and hath put it into the heart of the most pious and affectionate servants of Christ to brave their rigours. The Moravian missionaries have not sought stations of ease, or of emolument, but have gone where human misery required most consolation, and where their devotedness to the Saviour might be most conspicuous.

of the words of the text, I intend in this discourse to point your attention to some of the lessons which winter teaches us, and to some of the exercises to which it peculiarly calls us. The Saviour hath sanctioned such a use of natural objects by his own example, and it gives to the instructions of religion beauty and interest. It is true, that to the word of Christ our chief attention should be directed; but the volume of nature contains many interesting pages, and much which may illustrate and enforce the dictates of the Gospel.

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3. Winter is a striking emblem of the vanity of the world, and teaches us, that every thing in which we are disposed to trust will fade and pass away as the charms of external nature have done. To you, who are now in your full strength of body and of mind, whose senses are lively, and whose powers of perception and feeling are quick and strong, it is a memento, that the season of infirmity and dotage will come. The brightest eye will become dim, the readiest ear dull, the most retentive memory forgetful, the most cheerful heart languid, the most enterprising spirit feeble, the most vivid fancy tame, and the most ardent sensibility cold. As soon may you arrest the withering leaf, the shortening day, and the gathering storm, as stop the course of thy body or thy mind to decay. And what a lesson of contentment and resignation is not this to the aged! Your decay and desolation are the result of an appointment as certain and irreversible as that of the change of the seasons, and which calls you to a ready acquiescence. You have had your spring, your summer, and your autumn; and shall you receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall you not receive evil also? Think on the blossoms of your spring, the brightness of your summer, and the joy of your harvest, not to fret that these are over and gone; but to bless God that you ever enjoyed them, to thank Him that old age is but the fourth part of life, as the winter is of the year, and to adore the wisdom and the goodness which send it to detach you from a scene you must so soon leave.

To you who are happy in your family, who see

can efface from the virtuous heart; for such regions their constitutions are adapted; in the labours of the chase they find health and pleasure, and from the animals they destroy they obtain warm clothing by day and a comfortable bed by night. From them too they obtain oil to cheer their dwellings through their long night; and these lamps shine on happier beings than the silver or crystal chandeliers which illuminate the palaces of pleasure. What a blessing is the moon in every country during the winter! but it shines with peculiar lustre in regions from which the sun is absent for months, and there are various lights which are spread over the sky by which the gloom of that season is enlivened. The return of the sun is the hour of rapture, and the burst of vegetation seems like enchantment. What can be an object more sublime than mountains of ice increasing in height, exhibiting such a variety by the freezing of the spray, and presenting to the imagination the most varied forms of grandeur or beauty! Such too is the state of the atmosphere, that it is adapted for exhibiting the light of the sun above the horizon several days sooner, and retaining it longer, than would otherwise be the case.

Let us think how God hath gladdened such regions by the gospel, and hath put it into the heart of the most pious and affectionate servants of Christ to brave their rigours. The Moravian missionaries have not sought stations of ease, or of emolument, but have gone where human misery required most consolation, and where their devotedness to the Saviour might be most exercised.

3. Winter is a striking emblem of the vanity of the world, and teaches us, that every thing in which we are disposed to trust will fade and pass away as the charms of external nature have done. To you, who are now in your full strength of body and of mind, whose senses are lively, and whose powers of perception and feeling are quick and strong, it is a memento, that the season of infirmity and dotage will come. The brightest eye will become dim, the readiest ear dull, the most retentive memory forgetful, the most cheerful heart languid, the most enterprising spirit feeble, the most vivid fancy tame, and the most ardent sensibility cold. As soon may you arrest the withering leaf, the shortening day, and the gathering storm, as stop the course of thy body or thy mind to decay. And what a lesson of contentment and resignation is not this to the aged! Your decay and desolation are the result of an appointment as certain and irreversible as that of the change of the seasons, and which calls you to a ready acquiescence. You have had your spring, your summer, and your autumn; and shall you receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall you not receive evil also? Think on the blossoms of your spring, the brightness of your summer, and the joy of your harvest, not to fret that these are over and gone; but to bless God that you ever enjoyed them, to thank Him that old age is but the fourth part of life, as the winter is of the year, and to adore the wisdom and the goodness which send it to detach you from a scene you must so soon leave.

To you who are happy in your family, who see

lren flourishing in health and in industry, in
.id in honour, it is a monition that the time
ome; when, instead of being the solace of your
.ced life, as you now anticipate, they shall be
by you in the dust; and when you shall com-
in "I am like a pelican of the wilderness, I am
te an owl of the desert, I watch, and am as a spar-
ow alone upon the house-top." To you who are
now comfortable in your worldly circumstances, who
have a flourishing business, a respectable circle of
friends, a high repute for wisdom and integrity, and
an extensive influence over the sentiments and affec-
tions of those around you, the coming of winter is a
memento that your business may decline; that your
friends may forsake you; that your name may be
blasted, and that your influence may perish. The
voice of the blast cries, that all flesh is grass, and that
all the glory of man is as the flower of the grass.

The same solemn lesson may be extended to com-
munities and to nations. Their time of decay and of
desolation must come. In the dreariness of the fields,
whose beauties and fragrance were such that you ne-
ver felt weary in straying in them; and in the clouds
of a gloomy sky, lately so splendid, you are reminded
that the fashion of this world passeth away. What
[illegible] the history of the world present to us, but the
[illegible] decline of kingdoms? and while the his-
[illegible] church exhibits to us the spread of truth
[illegible] up to us scenes which they once
[illegible] where error prevails, where ini-
[illegible] and where the love of many waxeth
[illegible] mourneth and fadeth away, the
world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty peo-

ple of the earth do languish." Let us be impressed with the belief that here we have no continuing city. Turn away your eyes from beholding vanity. Listen to the details which the old give you of what they have seen, and they will tell you that the families uppermost in their youth are now extinct, and that names then famous are now forgotten.

4. In winter we behold an affecting monitor of man's mortality. So ready are we to put far from us the day of death, that we require to be frequently reminded that our days on earth are vanity; and how earnest and solemn is the voice with which all nature in winter calls on us to consider our latter end! The shortening days, the frequent rains, and the fading beauties of the surrounding scene, which mark the closing period of autumn, remind us of the approach of that season, in human life, in which men say, I have no pleasure. The plants, as they lie in ruins around us, thus accost us—"Frail man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more."* The freezing streamlet reminds us, that soon the current of the blood shall cease to flow; and the leafless trees may still suggest to us the reflection of Job,—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." How affectingly are such impressions connected by the prophet Isaiah with the most humbling views of human depravity, and of the best attainments of man!—"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; we all

* Psalm ciii. 15, 16.

do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* This lamentation is not the whine of a splenetic melancholy, but the wail of holy contrition.

In the repose into which nature is hushed, we are reminded that there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge in the grave, whither we are going; in the silence of the woods, that the daughters of music shall be brought low; in the migration of the birds, and in the cattle quitting the fields, that man goeth to his long home; and in the feeble and transient gleams of the sun, that soon the light of life shall yield only an obscure glimmering, and go out in utter darkness.

Such numerous and frequent remembrancers of death are appointed to us in wisdom and mercy; for, amid the attractions of the present scene, we are ready to set our hearts on its honours, riches, and pleasures, to forget its great duties, and to put far away the period of our removal.

Even the aged, who have seen so many fall by their side, still dream of years to come; and defer, to a season more advanced than threescore years and ten, the business of their salvation. To them as well as to others the warning voice of mortality is needful; and while they who give such admonitions are sometimes repelled with such taunts as these, Would you wish us to make our abode in the tombs, and to relinquish all the gaieties of life, for the gloom of the charnel-house and for the vigils of superstition? we

* Isaiah lxiv. 6.

which heat, labour, and moist weather had enfeebled is by it braced and invigorated. The gloom and despondence which were gathering over the mind are dispelled, and cheerfulness and activity prevail.

We cannot so well explain the beneficial purposes which winter serves to the animal creation, but from the benignity of Providence we may conclude, that it is to them the minister of God for good. To us it renders the spring and the summer doubly charming. Whence is it that we mark with such delight the early flowers of the spring, and that the simple melody of the cuckoo pleases us so much, and that we are more interested by it than by sounds far superior in variety and sweetness? It is because we view them as harbingers of summer, and as messengers sent by Providence to announce that the winter is past, that the rain is over and gone, and that the time of the singing of birds is come.

These views of the Divine wisdom, in the results of the season, may confirm our faith that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and that all the paths of the Lord, even those of them most dark and desolating, are mercy and truth to such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

II. Let me now, in the second place, specify some of the duties to which we are especially called at this season. There are various amusements which are deemed by some as the only thing claiming their attention at this period. There are sports in which there is a healthful exercise for both body and mind, and which it would be a most unwise austerity to

condemn indiscriminately. They are criminal if they are followed by any to the neglect of their business, with indiscreet keenness, or if they place them in scenes where they are exposed to corrupt association. The aged, when they speak of such sports, should remember how they felt when they were young with respect to them; and the man of wisdom must consider, that all have neither his sphere nor his relish for mental improvement. It is not in its wisdom, but in its pride, that philosophy frowns on all social recreations.

But winter is the period, especially in large cities, for amusements of the most dissipating kind; in which the evil passions of the heart are cherished, and all the restraints of sober-mindedness are thrown aside; in which snares are spread for the young and the unsuspicious, and impressions are formed most unfavourable to the practice of the calm duties of life, and to the reception of the humbling doctrines of the gospel. It will be said, how are you to find employment for the crowds which throng these theatres? and how will they dispose of the long and dreary nights of winter? To this it may be replied, that though difficult, the task is not impracticable of so improving the public mind and taste, that exercises more congenial to intelligence and cultivated feeling will be relished, and that to encourage lesser evils in order to prevent greater, is to do certain mischief in mere apprehension.

There are amusements in some villages and country houses at such seasons, which, though sanctioned by custom, which renders men insensible to their folly

ensnaring tendency, should be discountenanced. ctices allowed in thoughtless gaiety impair that licacy which is one of the guards of innocence, embolden the rude, and lessen that horror with which we should regard the appearance of evil.

Winter calls us to devout contemplation. It presents many pleasing and many sublime objects to the view. This is the season in which the moon and stars are beheld shining in their brightest splendour, and we are led to the humble reflection of the Psalmist,—"When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; then say I, what is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of men that thou visitest him?"* When we think of these planets as so much superior in size and splendour to this earth, and as, in all probability, inhabited by beings of a superior order to man, it will appear most amazing that God should so love this world of ours as to give his only begotten Son to assume human nature when it was thus degraded, to dwell among us, and to die in it in the most ignominious form to save us. Now is the season, when, in the brilliance of the morning and evening star, we may behold an emblem selected by our Lord himself for the beauty of his character, the light of his word, and the blessings of his course. The aged may here behold an emblem of that star which shall solace and guide them in the evening of life. It is the best blessing of its twilight.

If we survey the face of the earth when it is cover-

* Psalm viii. 3, 4.

ed with snow, amidst the gloomy sameness which is spread over it, the heart of the penitent sinner is revived by these words: "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."* What a variety of beautiful objects are presented to us by the hoar-frost, or the frozen dew or mist on the hedges and on the ground; and while we mark them, we are reminded how God can embellish the humblest scenes, and make what seems intended to degrade, the means of beautifying the meek and lowly! When we see the rivers swollen by the melting of the snow and the ice, and mocking, in their fury, the bounds raised to confine them, we should adore that power which limits their ravages, which provides such a variety of methods for absorbing them, and which makes them deposite in their course a fertilizing slime.

The masses of snow which rush down from the mountains, which accumulate in their progress, and which, in some cases, overwhelm whole villages, are directed in their course by him who walks on the wings of the wind. In beholding him sending out his mighty word, and melting the thickest ice, we see how he can turn again the captivity of his church and of every member of it, and how he can restore to activity and enjoyment from every restraint. If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

In beholding the summits of lofty mountains covered with snow, while spring is making the vales to

* Isaiah i. 18.

blossom, and the little hills to rejoice on every side, we see enough to check our discontentment with the humble scenes which we occupy, and our envy of those whom God hath raised up on high. If they have a brighter sunshine, they have bleaker winds; if they have a loftier station, they have less security; and if the eye has distant objects to attract it, it hath nought to rest on at hand. Lo! these are but a part of his way; but it cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.

2. Winter calls to reading. There are some classes in society, who, amidst the rigours of winter, are precluded from their usual employment. There are seamen, who, during this season, can remain at home with their families; and there are others, whose labours must be suspended during severe frosts. Such a season ought to be occupied carefully by such persons in the acquisition of knowledge. They should study to improve themselves, not only in the knowledge connected with their own business, but in other parts of useful education. Even with regard to those who labour during the day in winter, their short period of toil leaves them leisure in the evening to pursue unfatigued any course of knowledge for which they have capacity or relish. Popular treatises on every part of science are now in general circulation, and, though among classes in the community doomed to menial labour, deep research is not to be expected, such progress may be made as will tend to that expansion of mind which is so friendly to piety, and which is so replete with enjoyment. Think from

what scenes of folly and excess such a search for knowledge will save them, and with what feelings of inward satisfaction they will retire to repose, compared with his who has been spending his earnings in jollity. The winter evenings seem a merciful provision of Heaven for the benefit of such classes. That dwelling never can be solitary in which there are books. Hours spent in reading carry their own reward with them; for wisdom is better than rubies. How respectable is the appearance of the labourer in the winter evening, sitting by his fire-side with his book in his hand, and giving his heart to know wisdom! His partner in life is eager to put the house in order, that he may read undisturbed and in comfort; and blesses God that her lot has been cast with one whose converse can enrich her mind, and who delights in home, and not with one for whom she might have to seek in the scene of folly.

These remarks apply peculiarly to religious reading. This is the reading in which God shines into the heart, and Heaven opens to the view. What a curse to families have the inflammatory and blasphemous publications of the day been! They have roused the most malignant feelings, and imbittered all domestic intercourse; but where the Bible dwells richly in all wisdom, faith, hope, and charity exercise their most benignant influence, and every hour and every comfort is doubly blessed.

3. Winter brings with it many opportunities for conversation. It is at this season that the lowest classes in society have it in their power to mingle with friends and neighbours, and, by this intercourse,

to benefit and to gladden one another. Such interviews are not imbittered by the idea of neglected labour, as has been the case at other seasons.

There is a conversation, which is idle and vain, which Christians ought not to encourage. I mean not to condemn the amusing tale, or the sprightly sallies of wit and humour; but there are jests so coarse and severe as to disgust and offend, and there are corrupt communications into which no good man can enter. Nature, providence, and religion, open an inexhaustible variety of subjects. What an excellent opportunity is it for talking over the religious instruction given us on the Sabbath, or the information we have got from the books we have been perusing! Some talk of the sermons they have heard, to show their skill in criticising them; and others of the books they have read, in ostentation of their learning; but the wise and good will speak what they feel adapted to improve, have far more pleasure in commending than in finding fault, and consider humbleness of mind as the best lesson.

What a blessing to a family is that father, whose heart indites a good matter concerning the King of saints, and whose tongue sets forth to his family the graces of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light! What a blessing to a family is that mother who employs such a season as this, not only in teaching, by her example, domestic management, but in pointing out the wisdom of meekness, the safety of humility, the peace of contentment, the beauty of holiness, and the cheering influence of habitual devotion

How delightful is it to see children sitting round the fire with catechisms and Bibles in their hands, and showing, by the questions which they put, the interest which they feel in divine things, and their desire to be instructed as to their meaning and their obligations! Children will, in after life, value your holy communications as the best advantages of their lot. Let not age darken such a scene by any of the freaks or fables of superstition. I said days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.

4. Winter opens a sphere for the exercise of charity. It brings with it a variety of hardships to the poor, which wealth is able and which benevolence is willing to relieve. Think of the mournful prisoner to whom no fire is allowed, and who has no money to procure it; how painful must his situation be from the cold fetters on his hands and feet, with nought betwixt him and the floor of his cell but a little straw, while it is impossible for him to give the smallest exercise to his benumbed limbs! While virtue abhors his crime, mercy will pity his wretchedness. To leave him to suffer unpitied is to harden his heart, and to make him gnash his teeth in rage against God and man. Kindness hath softened the obdurate heart, melted the most audacious into contrition, and made the wild blasphemer lift up his voice and weep.

It sometimes happens in winter that labourers are thrown out of employment, and though they ought, by the saving of a part of their earnings, to provide for the evil day, yet this is not always done, and something must be devised for them to execute, that relief may be given as wages, not alms. There are many whose

poverty unfits them for purchasing a proper measure of fuel or clothing in a severe winter; and they must be assisted and supplied by the bounty of the humane. Go into the garret where a poor old woman sits shivering beside a few embers in her chimney. Over her withered body she has spread every rag in her dwelling, yet still she shivers. The pittance allowed her by public charity will scarcely keep her in bread and water, and she is unable to move out and to knock at the doors of the opulent. How can wealth be better employed than in giving blankets, and raiment, and food, and coals to such an object, in making her heart glad by kindness, and her habitation comfortable by a cheerful blaze? How noble is the reward to a virtuous mind, when the withered hand is lifted up to bless the benefactor, and the lustre of hope and joy brightens the sinking eye! "If I have seen any perish for want of covering, or any poor without clothing; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; then let mine arm be broken from the bone."*

Go into that dwelling where the head of a family lies on a miserable bed struggling with disease. Medicine he cannot purchase for himself: the little money he had, when sickness came upon him, went to buy bread for his children, and now it is spent; his partner returns and tells him that her efforts and solicitations for relief have been in vain: despair crushes his heart, his children crowd together in a corner of the chamber, and clasp round each other

* Job xxxi. 19—22.

to keep themselves warm; while one whispers to another, "I am hungry, but I will not say so, for it will make my father weep." Let the merciful hasten to such a scene with their aid. Misery cries, "Make no tarrying." If your circumstances are comfortable, such acts of mercy will give you far more enjoyment in your good things than you could otherwise have attained; and if you are in difficulties, giving what you can spare to such objects will strengthen your contentment and lighten your burdens. To do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

In concluding the discourse, I would say to all my hearers, Be more attentive to these lessons, and more zealous in these exercises than you have ever yet been. Implore that divine influence which is necessary, that you may apply your hearts to piety and wisdom. Attend to the lessons taught you by other seasons, and perform the duties incumbent on you at other periods. Uniformity is the beauty of the Christian character, and constancy the result of its impulse.

Let the young beware of sinning against the Lord at this season by indulging in acts of mischief, which, though to them they appear sportive and harmless, are a serious annoyance to others. Let them beware of sporting on the Sabbath; for God will punish them for such daring profanity, and the thoughtless parents also who permit them to engage in it. And let no call of amusement induce you to be absent from school, or to neglect any message which has been intrusted to you.

Let not the aged complain that they have no alleviations of the rigours of winter; that its severity aggravates all their ailments, and prevents them from attending on religious ordinances; that the decay of their sight unfits them for reading; that they are too dull of hearing for conversation; and that time hangs very heavy on them: for why should a living man complain,—a man for the punishment of his sins? It is the Saviour's will that you should pray always and not faint. He can give consolation by his Spirit when all the means of it have failed. Wait on him, and he will strengthen your heart. This may be your last winter, and if it is your worst as to suffering, may it be your best in patience, consolation, and hope. Amen.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGE OF CALEB.

NUMBERS xiv. 24. *But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.*

THE evil report brought by so many of the spies respecting the promised land produced the most unhappy results to the Israelites. Men sent out to explore distant regions have generally returned with the most encouraging accounts; and the multitude are disposed to yield to them ready and implicit credit. What specious accounts have been given, in the present day, of various foreign countries! The climate has been represented as most salubrious, the fields as marked by beauty and fertility, and the inhabitants as mild and courteous. Influenced by such delusive statements, many have abandoned comfortable situations in their own country, and repaired to places where they expected to find ease, plenty, and independence, but have found poverty, despair, and death. But the spies sent to explore Canaan brought a most unfavourable account of it. They said, it is a land which eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and the people in it are men of great stature, before whom we are as grasshoppers. To this the Israelites gave a ready ear, and wept and murmured, and said,—

"Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." In vain did Caleb and Joshua assure them, that Canaan was an exceeding good land, and that they had no reason to fear its inhabitants, for their defence was departed from them. Such was their infatuation and their fury, that all the congregation bade stone them with stones.

At this moment the glory of the Lord appeared before them; and he said to Moses, "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation, and mightier than they." Although this declaration was most honourable to Moses, and though he had been long harassed by their turbulence and folly, he could not bear the idea of their destruction, and pleaded for mercy to them as a parent does for a rebellious child. God listened to his prayer; but while he did not destroy them all in his wrath, he marked out as its victims the spies who had deceived them, and declared that not one of that generation should enter the promised land. In the midst of these testimonies of his displeasure, he bears in the text the most honourable witness to the character of Caleb, and opens the most gratifying prospects to him and to his family. Though Joshua is not mentioned in this verse, it obviously points to him as well as to Caleb; for he was animated by the same temper, and bore the same testimony, and the names of both are conjoined afterwards in the narrative as the two honourable exceptions in the wickedness and the doom of the messengers. The reason why Joshua is not here mentioned may be, that Caleb took a more active part

than he did on this occasion; or because it had been already foretold that Joshua, as the successor of Moses, was to conduct the Israelites into Canaan.

The character and promise in the text are rich in instruction, and are especially applicable to aged saints, whose conversation is in heaven, and who have lived a long and useful life in all godliness, and kindness, and honesty. Your attention has been turned to the deficiency and the doom of Belshazzar; and while you contrast with it the bright excellence and felicity described in the text, you will feel disposed with more ardour than ever to press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

I. Let us then attend, in the first place, to the character of Caleb,—a character drawn by no partial friend disposed to give a high colour to its merits,—by no short-sighted mortal who might be misinformed or mistaken,—but by him to whom all things are naked and open, and who is the Master and the Judge of every human being.

1. God styles Caleb his servant. He was so, not only as sent by him on this important business, but because, in his general conduct, he was influenced by a regard to his authority, and by a solicitude to please him. Amidst the most honourable testimonies to the piety of good men, Jehovah delights to speak of them by this term; and in their most favoured moments this is the epithet which they love to employ, as a memorial of their dependence and subjection. The enthusiast, when his mind is puffed up

with what he regards as the tokens of the Divine complacency, considers himself as the favourite of Heaven, and delights to exhibit himself to the world in this light. The language of humility and self-denial accords not with his feelings; and if he does use it, it is obvious that he employs it to secure to himself the more ample applause; but Simeon, after a most signal manifestation of the Divine complacency, speaks of himself as God's servant, whose office it was to obey his orders, and who was willing to be disposed of by him according to his pleasure. The honour put on him, and the kindness shown to him, made the will of his Lord more dear to his heart. Thus also the Apostle John, while about to detail the astonishing visions which had been vouchsafed to him alone, and in which there had been presented to his mind's eye every thing in the history of the church, and in the triumphs of the Redeemer, which could dazzle by its splendour, or charm by its blessings, tells us, that the things which he details Jesus Christ had sent, and signified by his angel to his servant John.

When men speak of themselves as God's servants, they may do it in hypocrisy or in delusion, deceived in their apprehensions of their own character, or wishing to deceive others; when others speak of them in this manner, they may do it in the language of a charity, whose conclusions, though amiable, are not infallible; but when God calls any one, as in the text, his servant, it is a certain intimation that he hath put his laws in his heart, and that it is the business and the delight of that person to do his will.

The privileges of the Gospel dispensation are held out by the Apostle as requiring the most exact and solemn regard to our Master's will:—"Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."* The moral law points out the nature and the extent of our service, and the Gospel suggests the most animating motives to fidelity and diligence. Our judgments must serve him by the rejection of error however specious, and by the study of truth however mysterious, and the adoption of it however offensive; our consciences must serve him by strict vigilance and righteous decision; and our affections must serve him by fixing on the objects, moving in the manner, and being influenced by the principles which he prescribes. The members of our bodies must be made the instruments of the soul in external service, and must be kept pure as devoted to righteousness.

This is the service of God; and aged saints can attest that his yoke is easy, and that his burden is light. Your period of serving him on earth is near to its close; but, like the Hebrew servant who had completed his course of service, and had come to the year of release, and who said, "I love my master, and I will not go out free," you feel that his worship is your bliss, and that you wish to serve him in heaven for ever without failure and without interruption. Still you desire to wait at his gates, to hearken

* Heb. xii. 28.

to his voice, and to die to the Lord to whom you have lived; and it shall be so: your good Master will strengthen you by his grace, and confirm you to the end.

How different is the service of God from that of the world! Is the law of love like the power of revenge, or the peace of goodness like the torment of envy? Are the languors of sloth like the cheerfulness of zeal, or the rottenness of sensuality like the vigour of temperance? Are the regrets of remorse like the testimony of conscience, or the forebodings of terror like the rejoicing of hope? This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.

2. Jehovah states that he had a different spirit in him from that of the rest of the messengers. His conduct made this evident to all around; but Jehovah saw it before it was possible for him to evince it in his conduct.

Their spirit was the spirit of unbelief. Notwithstanding the many proofs they had seen of the power of God, and of his fidelity to his promises, they questioned his ability or his willingness to put them in possession of Canaan; but Caleb believed that no obstacle could resist the course of Omnipotence, and that no event could make his promise to fail. While the infidel scoffer ridicules the hope of immortality as a delusion, and while the carnal mind cleaves to this world as its only portion, it is your attainment, ye aged saints, to sing,—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively

hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away."*

Their spirit was the spirit of cowardice. They trembled at the idea of the stature, and fierceness, and number of the Canaanites, and at the magnitude and the strength of their cities, and said,—"We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we;" but the spirit of Caleb was that of courage and resolution. He stilled the people before Moses, and said,—"Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it. Through God we shall do valiantly; for he it is that shall tread down our enemies under us." While others shudder at the idea of dying, and are discouraged by every difficulty which presents itself in the way to Zion, your resolution is,—I will go in the strength of the Lord God. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."†

Their spirit was that of pride and turbulence. Though they had reason to be satisfied with the honour conferred on them in being chosen from their various tribes to visit Canaan, yet they envied the higher repute of Caleb and Joshua, and the peculiar favour shown them on other occasions by Moses. This superiority they could not brook, and eagerly did they seize this opportunity of raising a tumult, that they might obtain a greater influence in the camp. But Caleb was meek and lowly in heart; he was satisfied with the distinction to which Providence had

* 1 Peter i. 3, 4. † Psalm xxiii. 4.

raised him, and felt more solicitous to deserve than to advance it. And is this your spirit? "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. I have surely behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."* How suitable is such a spirit in those who must say,—"The graves are ready for me!"

Their spirit was the spirit of malignity. Amidst all their pretended solicitude for the safety of the Israelites, and their unwillingness to see them discomfited and slaughtered by a powerful and bloody enemy, they wished to keep them from going forward to possess a country where they should be great and flourishing, and to induce them to remain in the wilderness, where they must soon have perished for hunger or thirst, or to return to the bondage in Egypt from which God had redeemed them. But the spirit of Caleb was that of patriotism and benevolence. His wish was, to see Israel triumphant over the enemies whom God had called them to subdue, and happy in the inheritance which God had assigned them. And is this your spirit? While the wicked try to hinder the salvation, and to ensure the ruin of others, the good wish them redemption from sin and wrath, and the enjoyment of grace and glory.

Samuel intimated to Saul, that when he should meet with the company of the prophets, the Spirit of the Lord should come upon him, and he should be

* Psalm cxxxi. 1, 2.

turned into another man, and God, it is said, gave him another heart. His subsequent history shows that he was not renewed in the spirit of his mind, and that this change can only refer to some mental endowment with which he was favoured. But when persons experience the change wrought on Caleb, they "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

3. Jehovah states that Caleb had followed him. This expression points out his compliance with the calls of his word, and with the impulse of his Spirit. God had given his word to Israel as a light to their feet, and as a lamp to their paths; and that word good men carefully examine; and whatever it enjoins them to believe, they credit; whatever it enjoins them to avoid, they shun; and whatever it enjoins them to observe, they do. Its doctrines, however opposed by the pride and the craftiness of human speculation, they receive with all readiness of mind; its prohibitions, though pointed against follies and excesses sanctioned by the world's indulgence, and gratifying to the tendencies of the carnal mind, they submit to without a single effort to set aside their authority; its rites of worship, though too simple for the lovers of vain show, and too frequent for those whose solicitude the world engrosses, are to them so pleasant, that they are glad when it is said to them,—"Go ye up to the house of the Lord;" and its precepts, though they frown on the laxity of fashionable manners, and require not only abstinence from every cri-

minal excess, but from every act of folly, and the suppression of every vicious wish in the soul, they love and observe.

Caleb had received the Spirit of God, and he obeyed his dictates. The opportunities of utility which he excited him to embrace he did not let slip, and the acts of self-denial which he urged him to perform he did not decline; from the sacrifice to which he prompted he did not shrink; the petitions which he suggested he offered in prayer; urged on by him he did not listen to the solicitation of indolence and languor; and when he restrained he did not hearken to the urgency of passion or of appetite. That the Spirit thus operates on the souls of the good, we have the strongest reason to believe. That must be an impulse from Heaven which leads to the cheerful sacrifice of all that is dearest to nature, and which makes feeble virtue to hold on its way in opposition to every danger which strives to drive it back, and to every allurement which tempts to wander. It is like the star which guides the pilgrim over the desert; and when no steps nor way-marks are to be seen, when the driving sand obliterates the traces of those who have gone before us, and when the sun hath set, it is a light shining in a dark place. "Thy Spirit is good; lead me to the land of uprightness."

This expression points out his imitation of the Divine excellencies. In his law God had displayed his moral perfections; and this, too, he had done in the revelation of his name to Moses. Now, we may believe, that Caleb would study the Divine character as thus manifested, and, struck with its beauty and

glory, and regarding conformity to it as the highest distinction of human nature, he laboured to resemble it. He imitated the faithfulness of God in his strict regard to truth; the justice of God in the uprightness of all his dealings; his holiness in the care with which he abstained even from the appearance of evil; his goodness in acts of beneficence and sympathy; and his wisdom in pursuing the noblest objects by the fittest means. "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

What precious advantages have we for following the Lord in that example of his Son, in which every excellence is displayed amidst the infirmities and the sorrows of humanity! Here we see beneficence ministering to the happiness of all around; meekness and gentleness, whose soft answer and winning benignity calm the fury of the passionate, and gain the heart of the sullen; the noble contempt of the world's brightest offers; and the humility which counted no sphere too low, and no service too degrading, which God assigned. When the world and its god offered him kingdoms and their glory, he chose, for our sakes, a life of toil in the relief of misery, and a cross where he might die for the salvation of the lost. Who can think of this example without saying,—"Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest!"

I may add, that the expression points out his adherence to the ways of God in all circumstances. There were seasons in which Israel prospered, and all God's paths dropt fatness; but while others became insolent, and wanton, and forgetful of God, Caleb walked humbly with him. There were seasons in

ıch Israel was chastened for their folly, and when ıey fretted against the Lord, but Caleb humbled himself under his hand. There were seasons when they were seduced into idolatry and vice; but Caleb maintained the worship of the true God and the purity of a holy life; and while the spies laboured to induce him to concur with them in their false statements, and threatened him with their vengeance if he contradicted them, he told the truth boldly, and maintained it, however scornfully it was received.

There have been followers of the Lamb who have cleaved to him when the violence of persecution threatened to sever them from their Master. They have held fast his doctrines when error enforced its blasphemies by the sword, and observed his ordinances while the blood of their brethren was flowing around his altars. When the rage of innovation beguiles multitudes from the simplicity of the New Testament, when the doctrines of the Gospel are mixed with the vain deceit of a spurious philosophy, and when the gaudy ceremonies of worldly pomp are mingled with the rites appointed by the Lord Jesus, these followers of God stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, and the good way, and walk therein, that they may find rest to their souls.

In whatever situation they are placed they walk with God. In prosperity and honour they are not ashamed of the reproach of Christ; the psalm of devotion which they raised from the dust they raise from the heights of Zion; and in those religious principles and hopes in which they bore the trials of life, they sustain the conflicts of the last hour. Those of

them whom Providence raises to eminence in science retain undiminished their delight in the Scriptures, and exhibit in their manner the simplicity of babes.

4. Caleb followed the Lord fully. We are not to suppose that this expression intimates that he had attained perfection in the qualities of his heart, or in the discharge of his duty. Its meaning is, that he had attained a pitch of religious excellence which was uncommon, and which Jehovah marked with delight. It is like the testimony borne to Job:—"Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?"

But let us consider, more particularly, the import of this remarkable phrase. To follow the Lord fully is to follow him sincerely. Some only profess to follow him. "They come before him as his people come, they sit before him as his people sit, and with their mouth they show much love; but their heart goeth after their covetousness."* But the good man can say,—"With my soul have I desired thee in the night season, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early; and the desire of my soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." In prayer the heart is elevated; in meditation the heart burns; in reading and hearing the word, God's voice is heard; and in showing kindness, the good that is done is a sacrifice to him. Some have professed to follow God while they went after others; but the good regard him with supreme esteem and with undivided love.

* Ezekiel xxxiii. 31.

It is to follow him universally. There are some of his ways which may be more agreeable to our natural dispositions than others, yet in all of them we must walk. Those whose dispositions are inclined to solitude may feel more pleasure in devotion than in the active duties of public life. The tender-hearted dwell with peculiar fondness on the compassion of our Lord, but do not admire as they ought the boldness with which he reproved and warned. But, tracing the stamp of Divine excellence on all that he did, of Divine authority on all that he said, and of Divine impulse in all that he suggests, we must follow the Lamb in all his steps. They who follow the Lord fully, do not consider how far it will be easy, or popular, or advantageous to follow him. They do not consult with flesh and blood, but the great object of their inquiry is, What is the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

It is to follow him cheerfully. There are some leaders whose followers discover by their countenance and manner with what reluctance they attend them; but they who wait upon the Lord find it their pleasure to tread in his steps. They feel no envy of the situation of those who say, We have loved strangers, and after them we will go; no wish to walk in the ways of their hearts and in the sight of their eyes, but they go on the way of the Lord rejoicing. There are seasons of languor, in which their progress is slow, and in which dejection and terror are sent to punish their indolence and sloth, but God will revive them again, that their hearts may rejoice in him. One ray

[illegible] their strength. This [illegible] on the number of their [illegible] him, for in the most solitary [illegible] in his name.

[illegible] to follow him constantly. Too [illegible] begin in the spirit, but end in [illegible] arise, offences come, and many [illegible] and we will walk after our [illegible] this is the resolution which the [illegible] and it is like that which Ittai the [illegible] to David,—"As the Lord liveth, [illegible] the king liveth, surely in what place [illegible] king shall be, whether in death or in [illegible] shall also thy servant be."* Behold the [illegible] in the kindness of his youth, went after his [illegible] that was not sown! See how, as the [illegible] family, he walks within his house with a [illegible] heart! He advances to old age, and mark [illegible] hoary head is found in the way of righteous- [illegible] View him on the bed of death, and his lan- [illegible] will tell you that he hath a desire to depart, [illegible] to be with Christ. Who would prefer to the [illegible] and the feelings of such a man the condition of [illegible] apostate, whose defection has been rewarded by [illegible] brightest distinctions which this world can be- [illegible]! We cannot draw back but to perdition. If we [illegible], we endure to eternal life. This is the pic- [illegible] drawn of all that follow the Lord fully:—"They [illegible] strength to strength; every one of them in [illegible] appeareth before God."†

* 2 Sam. xv. 21. † Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

et us now, in the second place, consider the ege of Caleb; and the statement here given of it gests to us the most animating motives to copy is example.

1. Jehovah expressed his approbation of him. He had done so to Caleb himself in the testimonies of conscience on various occasions, but now he did it publicly. Much will men do and sacrifice to attain human praise. The warrior thinks his toils and struggles well rewarded in the approbation of his sovereign; and the man whose public spirit has led him to successful exertions for his country's good, deems himself more than repaid in the blessings heaped on his name. But human applause is vain and transitory: it is often bestowed where it has not been merited, and is soon withdrawn to deck the name of some new candidate for popularity; but the approbation of Jehovah is that of a Judge impartial and unerring, and whose favour is better than life. This approbation of God was expressed in opposition to the reproach cast upon him by his associates and by the people. It was thus shown, that it was not in their power to blast his name, and that however their abuse of Caleb might appear to them while under the influence of passion, it was in the estimation of Heaven a persecution of him for righteousness' sake.

It is a remarkable circumstance about this approbation, that it is unqualified. The character of Caleb had doubtless its frailties; and these could not escape the notice of Him who searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men; but these infirmities he had graciously pardoned; he had no pleasure

in exposing them, and dwelt with delight on his general excellence. How opposite is this to the conduct of many! They will pass by all the holy beauties of a good man's character, and expatiate on a single fault, as if this was its leading feature, and showed that he was under the power of sin. The charity of worldly men is marked by excessive indulgence to its own, but by the most unrighteous severity to the saints of the Most High.

This approbation, too, was recorded in the Bible, that it might transmit the piety and fidelity of Caleb to every succeeding age, and might hold him up as a pattern of holy courage, and steadfast devotedness to duty. The records of human praise which, in former ages, were deemed a security for lasting fame, have passed away. The pillar of memorial crumbles down, the finest eulogy of human praise is written on the sand, and cannot be placed beyond the reach of the flowing tide of time; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and the characters which it celebrates shall be made known in every language, and be admired in every era of the world.

I may add, that it was a pledge of the approving sentence of the day of judgment, when to Caleb, as well as to every holy follower of the Lord, it shall be said from the great white throne, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."*

Approbation thus open and thus particular, the ser-

* Matt. xxv. 23.

vants of God have no reason to expect in the present scene; but the voice of conscience, which applauds the sacrifice which they make to truth and duty, and which repels the calumnies of a slanderous generation, is a testimony from God. The justice which is done to their intentions and efforts in the course of time, which had been grossly misrepresented, is likewise to be viewed as the language of their heavenly Vindicator, and in the day of judgment Christ will confess before his Father and the holy angels the pious and the upright of every age and of every land.

2. He promises him a happy settlement in Canaan. To Caleb, who was so sensible of the beauty and fertility of that country, this would appear a most desirable blessing, and to him the assurance of it must have been most solacing, when he had heard the confident assertions of the spies that it was in vain to invade it. In spite of every opposing effort, God would conduct him to it in safety. It was a circumstance connected with this privilege which must have deeply affected the mind of Caleb, that he and Joshua were the only two of that generation who should enter it. Goodness thus great, thus distinguishing, and thus constant, must have bound him more strongly to the service of his God. We have in the book of Joshua an account of Caleb's presenting his claim to the heritage promised him in Canaan, and of his obtaining it. "Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite came and said unto Joshua, Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses, the man of God, concerning me and thee, in Kadesh-barnea. Forty years old was I when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent

me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart. Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt; but I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God. And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; (for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced;) if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said. And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." It is most delightful to mark in this passage Caleb's grateful impressions of Jehovah's goodness, and to see him actuated by the same devotedness to God in old age as he had been in the former periods of life. He trusts not in his vigour, which he felt to be yet undiminished, but in the help

of his God, and complains not of the delay of the fulfilment of this promise, but asks it now as if conscious that the appointed time had arrived. How beautiful is it to see Joshua blessing him, and promptly granting his request! Instead of regarding him with envy, he loved him as a companion in toil, danger, and duty, and regarded it as his honour to assign him the reward which his zeal and courage had won.

As Caleb was a pious man, we may believe that he saw in this promise of Canaan an assurance of an inheritance in a better country, of which in all its beauty, and fruitfulness, and security, it was only a type. Earthly kings must limit their rewards to the present state. They have nought to give beyond the grave, but God's chief blessings are allotted there. The rewards he promises to worldly men, when he employs them in executing his purposes, are limited to the advantages of the present scene; and such were these which he promised to Nebuchadnezzar and to Cyrus: but godliness is profitable to all things, and hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. In the blessings of Canaan, Caleb beheld a prelude of a felicity more noble, which should be marred by no evil, and from which death should never remove him.

Such is the land to which God will conduct all the faithful followers of his son. For them it is purchased by the blood of their Leader, and he hath taken possession of it in the character of your forerunner. It is occupied, not as Canaan was, by na-

tions which must be assaulted, and conquered, and extirpated, ere you can possess it, but by angels and saints eager to welcome you to their society and their bliss. It is a land where no sin defiles, no curse blasts, and no fear darkens, but where all shine in God's light, rest in his love, and rejoice in his blessing. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."*

3. He assures him that his seed shall possess it. This good man felt a strong solicitude for the happiness of his children, and, amidst the fullest assurances of his own felicity, he would have felt anxiety and uneasiness had nothing been said respecting his family; but God declares, that the heritage which should be allotted to him they should enjoy; and the expression intimates, that they would approve themselves the children of such a father, and that they should not be left to forfeit such a portion by their degeneracy. Such an example as that of Caleb constantly before their eyes could not but impress them; and the testimony borne to it by Jehovah in the text was a motive to steadfast and active goodness of the strongest kind.

It is a remarkable circumstance, that Caleb and his descendants inherited that portion of Canaan which was possessed, when the spies visited it, by a race of men so formidable as to inspire all but himself with terror and despondence. In the very spot which his

* Ps. xvi. 11.

companions deemed inaccessible to Israel did Caleb dwell, and there his family flourished for many generations.

Various are the expedients which men have employed to secure their possession to their families. "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands by their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish."* How ineffectual these expedients are, the history of what is past, and your own acquaintance with the state of society, will convince you. How many once-flourishing families are extinct or sunk in obscurity! What they imagined would be a memorial of their power and skill, has been torn down by the caprice of an occupier who neither knew them nor cared for them, and their names have been defaced from their monuments to afford a place for those of another. Religion affords a much better security than all the expedients of human power or skill. The lessons which are taught by a holy father, and the habits formed under his culture, are likely to lead the young to that conduct which will ensure to them all the advantages of their parents. It is not likely that, in the hands of the youth who hath been taught to be diligent and sober, a father's property will be squandered in intemperance and folly, wasted in slothfulness, or risked on romantic speculation. A good and wise man, who is faithful in his duty as a parent, may indulge the hope,

* Psalm xlix. 11, 12.

that He who hath been his God will be the God of his seed, and that the lessons of piety and virtue will be their guides in all their inexperience, and their protection in all their helplessness.

It is a very beautiful circumstance in the history of Caleb, that he lived to allot portions in Canaan to his children. His daughter, whom he had given to his nephew to wife as the reward of his valour, went to meet her father, and lighted off her ass; and he said unto her, What wouldest thou? And she answered, "Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs."*

To all good men it may be said, that the piety and integrity to which they labour to form their children are the characters of the heirs of eternal life. If it is your care to bring them with you to Jesus, and to lead them on in the paths of wisdom, God may form in them the fruit of the Spirit, which is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth; make them followers of himself as dear children, and unite them hereafter with you in that happy land where the pious and the good inherit the promises. Thus you shall have with them now one spirit, one service, and one hope, and hereafter one song, one felicity, and one eternal home.

CONCLUSION.

Let good men be animated in the service of God by these considerations. Endeavour to be more active

* Joshua xv. 19.

and spiritual in it than you have yet been. Reflect often if there have been any parts of his service which you have omitted, and direct your attention to these. How shameful is indolence and languor in such a service, complaints of it, or desertion from it! Serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; and let the world see, from the enlargement of your views, and the liberality of your feelings, that, while the servants of God, you are free indeed.

Let the great distinction stated by the Apostle James, betwixt worldly and holy wisdom, be carefully remembered; and while the former is seen in the children of this world to be earthly, sensual, and devilish, let yours be seen to be pure and peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

Think of the wretched condition in which you once lived. In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, but God put his Spirit within you, and caused you to walk in his statutes. Turn not again to folly. Cultivate increasing conformity to the character and will of God. He draws you with cords of love, and shall you not run after him? Shall the votaries of the false prophet follow his steps in blood with such zeal and alacrity? Shall the misguided votaries of the church of Rome follow in stripes, in fasting, and in seclusion, the founders of

* James iii. 15—17.

the respective orders to which they belong, and shall Christians grow languid in following their Lord? Beware of showing that regard to any other master or pattern which you show to him. The good examples of others claim only a subordinate regard; and it is only in so far as they are followers of Christ that you are permitted to imitate them. Other examples must be compared with that of your great Lord; and if in aught they are opposite to it, we must in that disregard them, though they are the patterns of persons dear and venerable. The different parties of the Christian world are often named from the persons by whom they were founded; and while they warmly contend for the honour of their respective leaders, they forget that we are prohibited to call any man master on earth, for that one is our Master, even Christ. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* Superstition hath dedicated churches to particular saints, but to be churches of Christ is the best, the proper character of every religious society; and, speaking the truth in love, let them grow up in all things to Him who is their Head, even Christ.

Look forward to the happiness before you. Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall come in his glory, shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not de-

* 1 Cor. i. 12, 13.

eir garments; they shall walk with me in for they are worthy. To aged Christians I say, you shall in a little while enter into the bet- country. See that your meetness for it is ad- ancing. You shall soon take leave of your con- nexions here; and shall you not travail as in birth till Christ be formed in your children and friends the hope of glory? They must be united with you now in the graces of piety if you wish your parting to be com- fortable, or your meeting again to be happy; and the more eminent they are in holiness, the more will it re- dound to their honour and felicity, and to your own.

Let unconverted men consider that they are led captive by Satan at his will; and such is the folly of the sinner, that he is insensible of his bondage. The principles which actuate you are the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; and by these the soul is degraded and cursed. The path in which you walk is broad and crowded, but it leads to destruction. Think not that you can attain happi- ness in the course you are now pursuing. You are following phantoms that flee from your grasp; and could you grasp them even when they appear in most enchanting beauty, you would find them emptiness and vanity. In the path in which you walk you have no reason to expect exemption from perils and sorrows. Your bright sun will soon be clouded; and from the darkness the storm shall descend on you. Death will soon approach you riding on his pale horse, and hell following with him. The place of your in- heritance shall be the prison of darkness, and the portion of your cup the fierce wrath of God. Yet to

you Jesus still says, as he did in the days of his flesh, "Follow me;" and, like the disciples, arise, leave all, and follow him. Leave all thy sins and follies; it is ruin to retain them. Leave all that would obstruct thy salvation; He can more than compensate it. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* May your hearts be inclined to the obedience of faith, and be filled with the power of devotion.

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* Matt. x. 24.

DISCOURSE XVII.

THE FEELINGS SUITED TO OUR LAST SACRAMENT.

MATTHEW xxvi. 29. *I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

THE last words of a Man of God, at the close of a religious solemnity, are regarded with peculiar attention. The mind of the speaker is then supposed to be under the strongest impulse of devotion; peculiarly solicitous for the welfare of those with whom he has been associated in the exercises of religion, and with all of whom he is conscious he never shall again meet, and deeply impressed with that final account which will soon be demanded by the Judge of all. The parting warnings, and counsels, and encouragements of such a man, have counteracted the influence of temptations to folly; have kept the mind steadfast in seasons of difficulty; have excited to the most arduous duties, and reconciled the heart to the most painful separations.

Our text presents to us the last words of the Lord Jesus at the observance of the Holy Supper,—words rich in admonition and in comfort,—words which give us the most interesting view of our Saviour's feelings in that trying hour, and which have melted many a heart in pious affection, and inspired many a fearful soul with the most blessed hopes. They

lead us to connect the exercises of religion on earth with the worship of the upper sanctuary, and to view the consolations of the communion-table here as a pledge of the pleasures which flow at the right hand of God. These words sound the knell of death to the feeble and declining saint in a tone solemn, yet soft and sweet. Worldly scenes of splendour and festivity often close with feelings of fretfulness and disgust, and the happiest of them with expectations of meeting again which are seldom realized; but the holy communion is terminated in unabated love and in overflowing consolation.

In discoursing on these words, I shall consider them as an intimation given by our Lord of his death; as a promise of reunion with his disciples in heaven; and as a memento which may be viewed as addressed to some at every celebration of the Holy Supper.

I. Let us consider these words as an intimation of our Lord's speedy departure, and of the termination of all the present intercourse of his disciples with him.

Our blessed Saviour made frequent references to his death during the course of his life. It was an event by which the great ends of his mission were to be accomplished, and to it every step of his humiliation pointed as its destined close. His disciples were very unwilling to admit the idea of it, from the attachment which they felt to their Master, and from the destruction to all their hopes of temporal power and glory which was involved in his death of violence and shame. To reconcile them to an event so necessary, he expatiates on its blessed results, and generally

connects with it consequences of the most happy description both to himself and to them.

He had, in instituting the Lord's Supper, represented the breaking of the bread as an emblem of the torture of his body, and the pouring out of the wine as a figure of the shedding of his blood; and to keep them from flattering themselves with the delusive thought, that this event was at a distance, he intimates to them in the text, that it was so near that he had taken with them his last meal.

The intercourse of our Lord with his disciples had been of the most affectionate kind. Though his meekness and patience were frequently tried by their mistakes and indiscretions, he knew the sincerity of their attachment, and delighted to open their minds to wisdom; and while he received the testimonies of their regard, he felt a pleasure in showing to what he had destined them. But that intercourse was now to close; from the circle of love and peace in which he now sat he was about to be removed into the assembly of the wicked, and to suffer all the ignominy and pain which their unrestrained malice could inflict.

It is most interesting to mark with what mild resignation our Lord contemplates this event. How many are there to whom the idea of separation from friends by death is intolerable, and who cannot speak of it but in murmurs as vain as they are impious; but Jesus utters not one syllable of complaint, and felt the most entire acquiescence in the will of God in all its circumstances. What clearly demonstrates the superiority of our Lord's spirit and character in this matter is this,—that death is an event to which

we must submit, and from which no reluctance on our part can secure us; but Christ was voluntary in dying. What was dear to him in life he willingly sacrificed; what was painful in death he cheerfully bore.

Our Lord's language intimates the necessity of his dying to his mediatorial glory and to the future happiness of his people. In the first part of the text he lays the foundation on which our hope rests of all the felicity contained in what follows. The rewards which he anticipated from the hand of his Father were to be the result of his becoming obedient to the death, even the death of the cross. It was by the cross that his path to the throne lay. It was from the scene of agony that he was to enter into rest. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame. He would have been happy and glorious for ever as the Son of God, though he had left us to perish; but his exaltation, as the Son of man, depended on his finishing the work which was given him to do; and the felicity of that nature is associated with the salvation of human beings, and the glory which results from it to his Father.

He had intimated, that his death should procure for his disciples the remission of their sins, and that it was for this purpose that his blood was to be shed; but he states also in the text, that, by its merits, they should attain the highest felicity in heaven. These merits should open to them the fountain of life, and elevate them to a throne of glory. He had told them, that if he went not away, the Comforter would not

come to them; and here he tells them, that this departure was as necessary to their coming to God. Thus alone could the obstacles which were in their way to the kingdom of the Father be removed, and on this basis must their hope of eternal life rest. Now, what could be better adapted to reconcile the minds of the disciples to his death than these considerations? The dying have generally to labour to bring their own minds to a cheerful submission to the event, as well as those of their friends; but it was not his own heart that Jesus had to persuade to acquiescence, but those of the disciples.

I have only to add, on this part of the subject, that our Lord, in contemplating this as his last participation of the Holy Supper with them, may be viewed as anticipating the close of all that worship which was suited to his state of humiliation and suffering. There will not be such a difference betwixt the holy exercise of the human nature of our Lord in earth and in heaven as betwixt that of his people. Here good men are in a state of imperfection; but in heaven their worship shall attain a purity, an intenseness, and an elevation, of which they can now form no adequate idea; but our Lord's exercise on earth was perfectly holy, and differs from that in heaven in this respect, that in the one it was suited to the character of the man of sorrows; in the other, to that of Him whom God hath set at his own right hand. Here there was much need for patience; there pain and grief are never known. Here his prayers were filled with supplications for his Father's support and consolation; he sighs always before him. Here his devo-

tion was often interrupted by the perverseness and the timidity of his disciples; there all listen in rapture, or join in adoration. It is in his love that their hearts burn, and in his reverence do they adore. Such was our Lord's farewell at this ordinance. When he took his leave of the daughters of Jerusalem, he intimated to them, that they should meet with him again in the judgments which should desolate their land and consume their city. When addressing, for the last time, the high priest and the council, he said to them,—Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven; see him as their judge who shall cast them into outer darkness; but in taking leave of the disciples he tells them, that they shall meet in the purest blessedness in the kingdom of God.

II. Let us now consider the intimation our Lord gives of a reunion.

There are two considerations which stamp a peculiar beauty on this assurance. The termination of his intercourse with them was to be closed in a manner no way creditable to their attachment or their courage. Three of them were to slumber during his agony, in spite of his repeated injunctions to them to watch with him; and all of them, in the moment of his being apprehended, were to forsake him and flee; yet with them he anticipated a reunion. His generous heart could forgive their weakness and cowardice, and friends and foes were the objects of a charity which was stronger than death. I may add, that this

ise of reunion, following so immediately the no- of his separation, shows, in a most affecting man- r, how unwilling he is that his people should mourn in hopeless grief, and how ready he is to solace and to encourage.

It has been much disputed to what place or scene our Lord refers as that of reunion with his disciples. Some have supposed that it refers to his renewed intercourse with them after his resurrection; and in this view it intimated to them, that the death of their Master, to which they looked forward with so much terror, would only be a temporary subjection to the last enemy. It intimated also, that he would rise in heart unchanged, with the same delight in their society and the same solicitude for their welfare as ever. That such was the case is plain from the evangelical history, where we are told of various meetings which he had with them, of the language of kindness which he addressed to them, of the commission with which he intrusted them, and of the promise of his presence with them in all their labours to the end. But, as it appears to me that our Lord meant to suggest the fullest consolation, it seems better not to limit the passage to an intercourse with them on earth, which was to lie in a few meetings during the space of forty days, but to consider it as pointing to the communion of the world of glory. We have no evidence that Christ observed this ordinance with them after he rose from the dead, or that he ever administered it but at this time; and the language of the text seems most accordant with heavenly scenes and enjoyments.

1. Considering it as referring to the heavenly state, I

remark, in the first place, that this promise suggests that the reunion of the disciples with their Lord is certain. The promise is made by him who hath the keys of death and of the invisible world, who was made perfect through sufferings to bring many sons to glory, who was going away to heaven as their forerunner, who cannot alter the word which hath gone out of his mouth, and who hath all power to fulfil every purpose of his heart. Their Lord had thus spoken to console them:—"I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am there ye may be also."* On such an assurance they might confidently rely; his veracity and his heart were pledged to its accomplishment; and he is pleased to consider the final salvation of his people as forming a part of his destined reward, and will be glorified in their honour, and blessed in their happiness.

The enemies, by whom their present separation was to be brought about, could have no power to prevent their reunion. He was to triumph over them even on his cross; in his ascension he should lead captivity captive, and in his glory he should permit none to pluck them out of his hand. Their reunion should be as dear to his Father as to himself; I say not that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you. To Him he should address the claim, —"Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me; that they may behold my

* John xiv. 3.

glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me from the foundation of the world."* And the Holy Spirit he should pour down on them as the Spirit of glory, and he should be their conductor to the world above.

Of his faithfulness and power they had already very ample experience. They had gone forth to labour in scenes where success seemed most unlikely, but, as their Master had assured them, he had made their way prosperous; they had been exposed to danger, but the protection he had promised they had fully enjoyed; and when they went out without either staff or scrip, relying on his declaration that he would provide for them, they lacked nothing. And if, while here in the form of a servant, and in a state of poverty and abasement, he could put forth such power and maintain such fidelity, what could he not do as the Lord of glory?

Men have often spoken of meeting with their friends in heaven when they were parting with them in death; but they speak of a place whose gates they have no power to open, whose bliss they have no power to allot. It is in many cases the language of ignorance and presumption, which reason will not sanction, and which conscience condemns; but the Speaker in the text is the way, the truth, and the life. Every heart is in his hands, every lot is in his sentence, every region is in his power, and all futurity is in his eye.

2. It intimates, that this reunion should be in the

* John xvii. 36.

most glorious place, even in the kingdom of his Father. This representation is here given of the heavenly state, because, at the consummation of all things, Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and because it was from his Father he was soon to receive the promised reward. It was to him he about this time addressed that prayer,—"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with that glory which I had with thee before the world was."* He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and as from his hands his most painful sufferings had proceeded, so his voice should pronounce his welcome, his hand fix his crown, and his countenance make him blessed for ever. But whatever idea may be attached to this expression, we are certain that it is so far from suggesting aught unfavourable to their reunion, that it intimates that it will have the highest sanction of the Father. He will rejoice in it as the blessed consummation of his thoughts of peace, and as the intercourse of creatures for whom he hath done more than for any other class of beings with his own Son. That this reunion should be marked by his Father's approbation, as the fulfilment of his purpose, the glory of his love, and the end of Christ's entering within the veil as our forerunner, is obvious from his words, —"Tell my brethren, I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." It will take place in a scene where nought can occur either to imbitter or to terminate it. When they met after

* John xvii. 5.

his resurrection, it was while Christ had not entered fully on his glory, and while they were in a state of imperfection, and by their errors, their prejudices, and their carna. hopes, rendered the interview less pleasing to their Lord than it would otherwise have been. These carnal hopes he had to destroy, by calling them to expectations more pure and lofty; these prejudices he had to remove by enlarging their hearts, and these errors he had to correct by the Spirit of wisdom; but in heaven there should not be a disposition in their hearts which did not accord with his own temper, a wish which did not coincide with his own plans, nor one feeling of regret that aught is a-wanting.

In that kingdom the highest honours were destined for himself; but to them, poor and despised as they now were, he would grant to share in his dignity, and to rejoice in his joy. In that kingdom there were crowns of life and thrones of glory for them also. His love deemed no abasement too low for himself, and no exaltation too high for them.

3. It suggests, that, when thus reunited, their intercourse should be most intimate and affectionate. In their present meeting, how endearing was the fellowship the disciples had with him! He manifests himself to them in a manner different from that in which he showed himself to the world, and in a mode of love, of which this was only an emblem, would he associate with them in glory. There were various circumstances here which limited their fellowship. There were scenes of suffering before him which darkened the prospect; there were services

which called him away from the retreat of friendship; there were expressions of kindness which they might abuse, and disclosures of truth which they were not yet able to bear; and there were infirmities and corruptions about them which he could not see without dislike; but how different would be the case in his heavenly kingdom! He should see nought, either before himself or them, but unfading honour and uninterrupted joy, and behold in them the excellencies in which he delighted, purified from every defect, and elevated to their highest degree. There should be nought about them to prevent his regarding them with unmingled complacency, and treating them with unlimited indulgence. There was much in his intercourse with them here that was trying to nature; but there they should be fitted for every communication he was pleased to make, and for every service he chose to require.

In his intercourse with them here Judas mingled, though he had probably gone out before the institution of the Holy Supper; but in heaven there should not be one whose heart was not sincere in friendship, nor one whose presence should in the least check the freest disclosure of the Redeemer's feelings. Here too the idea of the termination of this intercourse afflicted the disciples; but in heaven they should reign in life, never see their Saviour's countenance less complacent, nor behold the last enemy but in his final destruction.

4. It intimates, that in this reunion they should enjoy together the purest and most blissful delights. The phrase "new wine" is frequently employed in

Scripture to represent pleasures of the highest order; and such must be the case with the delights of the heavenly world. The Saviour shall then bestow upon them the blessings which he shed his precious blood to purchase, and which shall fill with rapture every faculty of their nature. They shall possess all the felicity which can arise from the fullest consciousness of Divine love, the brightest conformity to their Saviour's image, the liveliest exercise of every holy principle, the clearest view of Jehovah's wonders of mercy, and the sure possession of every good. The sweetest pleasures of this earth may become insipid and nauseous, and there are dregs in the most delicious cup,—"Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; for in the end it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder;"*—but for these celestial enjoyments there is increasing relish. This new wine can never become vapid or bitter. Heavenly pleasure never cloys, and never fails. Thus saith the Psalmist,—"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we see light."†

There are three ideas which are most deserving of our attention here. They shall enjoy these delights with the Saviour. His presence shall heighten the beauty of paradise, and render more delicious the liquid which proceeds from its living fountains. In

* Prov. xxiii. 31, 32. † Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9.

all the tokens of their Father's complacency he shall share, and in all their attainments in excellence he shall be the pattern. The expression intimates too, that the enjoyments of the heavenly state shall be the same in kind with those of the sanctuary on earth, however they may differ in degree. They are excited by the same objects, and directed by the same spirit. In the world above they are marred by no painful recollections, no fear, and no distrust. No worldly feeling is there to repress their devotion, and no malignant impulse is there to damp their charity.

It is here suggested also, that these enjoyments in heaven should, like the holy communion on earth, bear a direct reference to the cross. Every feeling of rapture will attest its efficacy, and every song of the redeemed shall celebrate its glory. Their robes are white, because they are washed in his blood; their palms are so verdant, because by it they are moistened. In their living rapture they feel the power of his dying love, and in their crown of glory they see what they owe to his death in shame.

I have only to add here, that their reunion with one another is intimated in this assurance. Though there were occasionally contentions and envyings among the disciples, they were warmly attached to each other, and it was gratifying to them to hear of their future intercourse. And Christ may have called it the kingdom of his Father, to show them that he spoke of a very different kingdom from that one, the idea of whose honours had inflamed their ambition and excited their strife.

III. I proceed now to consider these words as a memento intended for every observance of the Lord's Supper. Even in the smallest meetings assembled for this object it may be anticipated; and, in the most of cases, it is to a number that our Lord thus speaks. How many among us do we see approaching the Lord's table in that garb and look of sorrow which tell us, that since last communion they have been separated from those with whom they took sweet counsel, and went to the house of God; and there are sacramental solemnities in which we are reminded of the removal by death of ministers, who, on a preceding occasion, put into our hands these sacred symbols, and addressed to us the words of eternal life. Our fathers, where are they? The prophets, do they live for ever? And does not that impress us with the thought, that as another hand dispenses these symbols to us, so another hand than ours shall soon receive them, and that as they now dwell in silence so must we. At one sacrament or another these words will be addressed to every pious communicant, and sooner probably to the most vigorous and healthy than he is aware; for "we are strangers before God, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding."*

But there are some to whom the language of the text is peculiarly applicable. It is so to the aged Christian, whose heart and whose flesh fail, who has

* 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

come in much weakness to the house of God, and whose frailties tell him that he shall not see another season. It is so to him who has been smitten by incurable disease, who feels his strength declining, and who must say, "My breath is corrupt, my bones are burnt as a hearth, the grave is opening for me." And these words have been impressed on the heart of persons in their full strength by Divine suggestion, and by circumstances which have occurred at such solemnities, and which have made them say, as the Lord liveth, there is but a step betwixt me and death. It would be proper that all of us should consider our situation in this light; for none can promise himself another solemnity of this nature, and none will improve this ordinance properly who does not observe it as his last sacrament. Let us then consider how this memento of the Saviour at the Lord's Supper should be received.

1. It should be received with resignation. It is made by him who hath the power of life and of death, and whose will it is both impious and vain to resist. What can be more foolish than to attempt to resist the hand which turns man to destruction, or to insist on remaining when he saith, "Arise, depart ye, this is not your rest, for it is polluted?"

Besides the kindness of the manner in which he intimates this is another reason for resignation. It is with the voice of invitation and persuasion that he addresses you, rather than with that of authority; and shall you abuse that compassion with which he softens it into an encouragement to cry, "O spare me that I

may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more,"—instead of considering it as an excitement to a cheerful departure.

You cannot, in this scene, mark the resignation of your Lord to his Father's will, nor hear him saying, "The cup which my Father giveth me shall I not drink it," and be disposed to rebel against the determination of his Providence. If you enter as you ought into the spirit of this scene, you will answer this intimation in such language as this:—"O, my Saviour, I have no will but thine." And what is there in the world that should make you averse from complying. Your best pleasures here are those of religion, and you go to enjoy them in a more perfect manner in heaven. The friends to whom your hearts are attached by the ties of nature and of grace shall soon join you in glory. When your Lord then saith to you, "Arise, let us go hence," let this be your answer, I will go in the strength of the Lord God.

2. It should be received with gratitude. It shows his goodness to you that he apprises you of this event, that you may use all the appointed means of preparation for it. He wishes to save you from the anxiety and horror of those who shall be awakened from the sleep of security by the notice of his approach. He claims your gratitude too by the season and place which he employs for this intimation. We sometimes read of the warnings of death and judgment being given to men in the scene of guilty pleasure or of triumph; and the horrors of these are aggravated by the contrast they present to the excess of riot and to [illegible]ings of presumption; but this intimation de-

lightfully accords with the exercises and objects of a communion table. You have often thought of the frame in which it would be most desirable to die, and what is more suited to such an hour than the faith which relies on the righteousness of Christ, than the superlative love of a heart struck by his excellence, than the repentance which cries God be merciful to me, a sinner. Consider, that in this ordinance you may behold all that is terrible in death put away. Here you see Christ destroying death, and him who hath the power of death, that is the devil; and delivering them, who, through fear of death, were all their life born subject to bondage. Here you behold an atonement made for all your guilt, a price paid for all your happiness. Here you see Christ delivered for your offences, and rising again for your justification. It is impossible to believe this without feeling disposed to join with the Apostle in his song,—" O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* It is when seen from the side of the cross that death appears divested of its terrors and the grave of its gloom.

3. It should be received with love. How much is there in this intimation to excite our love! Here we see Christ submitting to death to redeem us from destruction, laying open to us the kindness of his heart, revealing the everlasting felicity for which he hath

* 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

destined us, and solacing himself in the prospect of being happy with us for ever. That heart must be lost to all proper feeling which is not kindled into affection by this statement of the Saviour. Ye aged Christians, who are complaining of the coldness of your hearts, let me call upon you to place them under the influence of that love which was stronger than death, and you will feel them burning with a more fervid glow. You are contrasting your present languor at his table with the kindness of your youth; but, while you mourn over your decline, beseech him to animate you with his own spirit, and to shed abroad his love in your hearts.

It ought to be heard too with increasing affection to our Christian brethren. We feel peculiar emotions of tender regard to friends with whom we associate for the last time,—and in the last look, word, and grasp, there is more of the heart than in any former testimony of friendship; and when you think that you shall mingle with your brethren in the sanctuary no more, you will raise to Heaven the earnest prayer that they may prosper in grace, and peace, and wisdom, and as you go away it will be with the parting blessing of holy benevolence. Aged persons have been sometimes charged with implacability of temper, with brooding over the injuries of former times, and instilling their prejudices and animosities into their descendants; but let your conduct show that you have fully imbibed the forgiving spirit of the cross, and that every malignant feeling is extinguished within you.

4. It should be received with a determination to

show increasing diligence in preparing for our departure. Your time is indeed short, and you feel that it is so; and, if you are now slothful, you will not have their apology, poor as it is, who flatter themselves that they have many years to live. You feel that indolence in you would be marked by peculiar criminality, and whatever is necessary to be done do it with all your might. Much remains to be done to complete your meetness for heaven; improve, therefore, the aids afforded you by the cross for purification from every evil, and for attaining conformity to your Saviour's image. Much remains to be done to promote piety among your connexions, and can you bear the thought of leaving any of them in their sins? There will be a peculiar solemnity in your prayers, and a peculiar earnestness in your admonitions, when they are uttered under the impression "that you are at the point to die." You feel that you are not yet so detached from the world as you should be; improve then the scene before you in such a way, that, by the cross, the world may be crucified to you and you to the world. Nobler objects solicit your affections, and let them now engage your whole heart.

5. It should be received with hope of the felicity here promised. This is the promise of Him who is the faithful witness, and, while such love breathes in it, you cannot question his intention to fulfil it. Besides, in the death commemorated in this ordinance, the foundation is laid of that power which has been committed to our Lord over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as God hath given him. The pleasure of your present fellowship with

the Saviour may lead you to look to your heavenly intercourse with desire, and the sufferings, which you behold with such interest warrant you to eye it with the fullest expectation. You have felt, in the intimation in the text, a power which extinguishes carnal hope, and which invigorates that of the gospel; and under its influence it becomes you to say, I will look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Behold, from the spot where you now are, the land of Emmanuel, whose mountains drop down new wine, and whose hills flow with milk, and where the Lamb stands, and with him the redeemed from the earth, having his Father's name written on their foreheads; and can you survey such a scene without longing more eagerly to reach it, and crying, with greater earnestness than ever, O, when shall I come and appear before God?

CONCLUSION.

Let such as feel the sentence of death in themselves approach the table of the Lord in the spirit I have now been describing. Be humbled on account of the imperfect manner in which you have observed former religious solemnities. Let your self-examination be more strict, your prayer more importunate, your attention more fixed, your faith more lively, and your love more fervent than ever; and thus your last may be your best communion on earth, your best in respect of grace and of comfort, and you will have reason to say as the guests at the feast at which Jesus turned water unto wine,—"Thou hast kept the good wine until now." And, while he thus blesses you,

may he grant to young communicants the joys of his salvation, and enable them to consecrate all the ardour of their youth to piety. "How great is his goodness! and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and the vintage the maids."*

Let those, who are promising to themselves a long continuance in the world learn not to be high-minded, but to fear: youth does not warrant such expectations. There have been some to whom the first communion has been the only one allotted to them on earth; we have led them to the Lord's table, and we have followed them to the grave. You will not pretend that you have any intimation from Heaven as to the prolongation of your life; but even though God had said to you, as he did to Hezekiah, I will add unto thy days fifteen years, it would be wise in you to consider your latter end, and, amidst the fellowship of the Lord's table, to think of the lonely and silent mansion before you. Life must be a scene of arduous duties and trials to every child of God, and I beseech you to improve the Lord's supper, for strengthening in you the charity which beareth all things, the patience which endureth to the end, and the zeal which is active in good works.

Let those who have, through a long life, observed the Lord's supper in hypocrisy, consider their state and ways ere they go to that table for the last time. God hath not punished your unworthy communicating by untimely death, but he hath done it by giving

* Zech. ix. 17.

you up to security and presumption. And have you not eaten and drunken judgment sufficient already that you will do it again? Is there so little criminality in being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord that you will again incur it? This thought may well startle you when I add, that the feast above shall not be profaned by your presence, and that you shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation. O humble yourselves ere you advance in the sight of God! Repent now and believe the gospel. What a memorable sacrament will it be if it is the first that you keep in the spirit of piety!

Finally, Let those who have lived to old age in the neglect of the Lord's supper consider what sins of omission they have to answer for; and the state of mind and of heart which has permitted you to live thus must have led you to many acts of impiety and wickedness; and be assured that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. It is the grossest folly in you to expect to have fellowship in heaven with that Saviour whom you have treated with such neglect here. There is so necessary a connexion betwixt grace and glory, betwixt the form and the power of godliness on earth and its rewards in heaven, that the latter cannot be had but after the former. You have not even the plea to knock with at the gate of heaven, that you have eaten and drunk in his presence. With the devil, whom you have served, you must dwell, and as with him you have sinned, so with him you must suffer. You have had fellowship with him in the enmity and impurity of your carnal minds;

and you shall have a part in the everlasting fire which is prepared for him and for his angels. It is with you the eleventh hour, but the Redeemer has not yet abandoned you. To you he saith, Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right that ye shall receive. Ye ought to have given yourselves first to the Lord, and then to the church by the will of God; yet still he is ready to accept of your immediate dedication of yourselves to his service, and of your last hour. Life is closing, eternity opens, and all depends on this passing moment. The Spirit and the bride say, Come, and this is Christ's own language,—Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. Let Christ's farewell at the feast of tabernacles be regarded as it ought by every heart,—"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."*

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* John vii. 37, 38.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE LIMITS OF LIFE.

PSALM XC. 10. *The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

THIS Psalm is entitled a prayer of Moses, the man of God. It seems to have been written by him when his mind was peculiarly impressed with the frailty and mortality of man, and after some of those mournful scenes in the wilderness in which many of the Israelites perished. Standing in the place of graves, he lifts his eyes to the throne of the Eternal, and adores the Being who lives and reigns for ever. It is amidst the sad memorials of human vanity that the majesty of the King eternal is most strongly felt, and that the necessity of an interest in his favour is most apparent, with whom is unchanging blessedness and everlasting strength, who can destroy in a moment creatures dependent on his will, and grant life for evermore to the objects of his mercy.

He then, in a variety of beautiful figures, sets forth the shortness and uncertainty of human life. The course of man's days is rapid as the progress of the torrent; and as in sleep time passes away without our consciousness of its movements, so, amidst the delusion and the bustle of life, we do not mark how we

hasten to the grave. Like the flower which blooms but for a day, man comes forth in his glory, and is soon trodden under foot. Such figures as these are common in the poetry of all countries; but they appear in this Psalm with a simplicity which leads the mind at once to the lesson which they convey, and with a tenderness which touches the heart. They are obviously introduced, not to embellish, but to convince and to impress.

Moses then points out the shortening of man's days as a token of God's wrath, and, in the words of our text, describes the bounds which he hath set to his existence on earth, and beyond which we cannot pass. The limits here stated are equally applicable to human life at present; they are fixed by Him whose counsels of old are faithfulness and truth, and his wisdom and his mercy are as evident in the appointment as his justice and his power. As well might the insect which exists only for a season, or which lives only for a day, complain that its Creator hath not allotted to it so long a course of being as he hath done to man, as that we should murmur that we are not permitted to retain this bodily life for ages. The remembrance of the origin of man's mortality, of that sin by which death entered into the world, would, if we had a due consciousness of its demerit, fill us with wonder that he spares us so long, and that he supports a life in which so much is done to dishonour him.

In the present age, an uncommon eagerness has been shown to collect, and to exhibit to public admiration, fragments of ancient poetry, and such remains of the genius of former times have been preferred by

many to the more correct and finished productions of living authors. And shall a poem so ancient as this Psalm, so complete in its structure, so rich in its imagery, so instructive in its lessons, and so devout in its spirit, be neglected or forgotten? Where this is the case it must be ascribed to a perversion of mind, which renders men blind to the highest beauties of writing, and averse from the best lessons of wisdom.

Some readers of poetry prefer the elegiac to every other species of it. It accords most fully with their pensive cast of mind, and brings before them images on which the fancy loves to dwell, and in which it finds a species of enjoyment; and to them, man, wasting as the fading leaf, is a more interesting object than man exulting in all the glory of his prime. And where shall we find a poem in which the mortality of man is described in a manner so tender, and in which it is so powerfully held forth to teach us the salutary lessons of humility and seriousness? To all classes of hearers the statement of the text presents claims on their attention. The young it will teach the folly of making length of days their chief desire, and to the aged it is like the warning which precedes for a few minutes the striking of their last hour. May the Spirit of wisdom and grace dispose us to consider and to improve its solemn admonitions.

In this discourse I shall make some remarks explanatory of the text, and shall then address to you some of the practical counsels which it suggests.

1. Let us consider threescore years and ten, or fourscore years, as the limit beyond which the life of man doth not pass. In the period before the flood the num-

ber of man's years far exceeded this. This cannot be ascribed to the peculiar excellency of the fruits of the earth at that time, since the ground was cursed immediately after the fall. It has been ascribed to the strength of the first principles of their bodily constitution; but a learned author remarks, "That this is no adequate cause of their longevity, since Shem, who was born before the deluge, and had in his body all the virtue of an antediluvian constitution, fell three hundred years short of the age of his forefathers, for the greater part of his life was passed after the flood." The true reason is, that God gave to men in these first ages this length of days for the peopling of the world, and for the more certain transmission of the rudiments of the gospel; and human life was abridged after the flood as a check to the audacious wickedness in which they had before it encouraged themselves, and that the generations destined to inhabit the earth might have each their appointed place and period.

There have been some who have reached ninety or a hundred years; but so rare are such instances of longevity that they are recorded as wonders, and the surprise which they excite establishes the statement, that life terminates generally at an earlier period. The river may, on a particular occasion, overflow its banks, and rush in wild impetuosity over the fields, yet none will say that this is its channel, or that this is the mode in which it usually flows. A tree may, through peculiar causes, maintain its verdure when others are shedding their leaves and passing into the nakedness of winter; yet this doth not evince that the order of nature is rescinded, or give

encouragement to the conceit that the frost and the wind shall put forth their blasting influence on the productions of the earth in vain. What God may grant to another in the distributions of his grace may encourage the penitent and the humble to hope in his mercy; but it is not his intention, in the extraordinary bequests of his providence, to cherish expectations of similar donations. The folly which leads men to expect to live a hundred years, because one individual may have reached them, is like that which encourages them to expect mercy in their last hour, because the thief on the cross obtained it. It hath the worst effects on life, and produces the bitterest feelings of disappointment and regret in death. But, instead of illustrating further a point so obvious, let us behold in it the sovereignty of God. Our times are wholly in his hands. In him we live and move, and through him we fade and die. Our days are determined by him, and with him are the number of our months. The mightiest prince cannot add one moment to his life; and while ambition in its progress, revenge in its fury, and despair in its madness, shorten to human view the lives of multitudes, they fulfil the appointment of him in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways.

If we attend to the situation of the wicked, we will perceive the wisdom of this limitation of life. Seventy or eighty years are surely a sufficient space for the exercise of the Divine patience with them, and for proving what is in their hearts, whether they will keep his commandments or no; and if the hope of

living to this period makes the sinner bold and presumptuous in sin; if, because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil, what would be the state of the world if they had the hope of living for several hundred years? Let us consider too how much the prolongation of the sinner's life would facilitate and extend his corrupting influence over others. As he advances in wickedness, the restraints of shame, of compassion, and of fear, which often check the profligate in their attempts to seduce others, pass away, and they become cruel, impudent, and remorseless. Much as wicked men on earth desire long life, there is not one wicked man in hell who does not wish that his course on earth had been shorter, as his misery would have been less had his crimes been fewer. It is for them to say, Why died I not from the womb? Why did not I give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?

To the righteous life is a state of manifold temptations, and as God doth not afflict willingly, he will not subject them longer to these than he sees it necessary for the trial of their graces. The trial of their faith, and humility, and patience, is not requisite to evince either the sincerity or the strength of those principles to his eye, but to others, and that their example may operate as an excitement to them. Now this end is accomplished by the sufferings of this appointed time. The meekness of Moses is as instructive a lesson in kindness and long-suffering as if he had borne for ages longer the perverse humour of a wayward peo-

ple; and the patience of Job is as powerful an inducement to humble ourselves under the hand of God as if he had suffered for hundreds of years.

Let us remember also the injunctions of God's word, with which a longer continuance of life would not so exactly accord, "Arise, depart ye, this is not your rest. Boast not of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like to men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately."* These precepts require a detachment from the world, and an engagement with heavenly objects, suited only to those who are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Let us think also of the wishes and desires for heaven which the holy Spirit forms, and, was their fulfilment deferred for a longer period, the heart would sicken. With these wishes and desires, the wishes and desires of their Saviour, as expressed in his prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me, where I am," beautifully correspond. There is not a good man in heaven, not even the man who felt most reluctance and fear to depart, who regrets that his abode on earth was short, or who wishes that his translation to glory had been delayed. Besides, it is a period of sufficient length for the service of our generation, if the days of it are redeemed as they ought. Some

* Micah ii. 10. Prov. xxvii. 1. Luke xii. 35, 36.

have formed schemes for the accomplishment of which they deemed it too scanty; but Jehovah can never want instruments to carry on any plan which is adapted for his glory, or for human happiness. If your schemes are the offspring of a pious and benevolent mind, it is good that they were in your heart, whether you are permitted to execute them or not. The most useful life that ever was led on earth occupied only thirty-three years and a half; and yet in that time virtues were exhibited which are the perfection of beauty, sufferings were endured through which the afflictions of every age are alleviated, and all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes, glory was brought to God in the highest, a righteousness was wrought out which hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified, and a sacrifice was offered which taketh away the sin of the world.

There is a presumption and a folly in human speculation which it is necessary for Providence to check, that it may not lead to the neglect of those common duties and more sober pursuits, which, though undervalued by the giddy and the romantic, are the end of the commandment, and the best object of life.

2. Let us consider that the limits of human life which are here specified are reached by few. That they shall arrive at them is the hope with which all in youth flatter themselves. They imagine that their life shall be protracted till their active limbs shall become stiff and benumbed, and till the bloom of manhood shall give place to ghastliness and wrinkles. But the folly of such hopes is, in the most of cases,

affectingly demonstrated. Cast your eyes over any large assembly, and of whom is it composed? For one hoary head how many do we see in the freshness of youth, or the vigour of manhood? Let us cast our eyes on the funeral processions which pass along our streets, and mark how many a coffin is followed by mourning parents, and by weeping brothers. How few are the parents who have not had the sad office to perform of closing the eyes of children, and laying their heads in the grave? And there are parents who hoped to leave behind them a number of children to be a credit to their name, and a blessing to society, who have been bereft of them all. The death of a brother or a sister is often one of the early lessons of the young,—a lesson by which every other lesson is enforced.

Let us examine the place of graves, and mark how often we meet with the simple but heart-affecting statement, that here lies the hope of parents, and that in the prime of their days the active and the enterprising returned to their dust. How solemn is the impression which is awakened by every step we take in such scenes, that here corruption is feeding, not only on cheeks which age had furrowed, or bodies which were emaciated by disease, but on cheeks glowing with health, and on bodies delivered to it in their full strength! Youth is more precarious than the tenderest plant, and verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Look around you on the scenes of business, and mark how often the active and the enterprising are cut off in the midst of their toils and cares. There is no scene of employment in which

life is sure, and no task can we engage in as to which we have any security that we shall live to accomplish it. Death commonly selects for its victims life at its best, and man in his prime. It becomes us therefore, instead of saying, "I shall see many good days, and rejoice in them all," to say, "I will use the world as if I was soon to leave it; I will live with my friends as if I was soon to part with them; I will discharge my duty as becomes one who expects soon to give in his account; I will attend on the means of grace as if the days of the Son of man were closing; I will occupy my talents as if my Lord was at hand to reckon with me; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." This is a warning in which his wisdom and friendship may be seen combined.

2. The text suggests, that the protracting of life to the limits here specified is not in itself desirable. The strength of such old men is labour and sorrow. In consequence of the decline of their faculties, the aged are unfit for labour; and when they do apply themselves to it, they are soon obliged to desist. To them the grasshopper is a burden. He to whom the longest journey was as nothing now finds it a task to totter along his dwelling; and he whose hands were once strong for labour, finds himself exhausted by the slightest exertion.

Mental application is oppressive to them likewise. It is a toil to them to read, and what they do read is quickly forgotten. The books in which they used to feel a lively interest now seem to them little adapted to their circumstances. In conversation it is so pain-

ful an effort to go along with a social party in their topics, that the aged are soon tired, and wish to depart. And when they come to public worship, how much is lost to them by their dullness! and what they do hear their memory hath no power to retain. This is often their sad reflection, "I would not remember God's word when I might have done it, and now I cannot though I would."

The languor and the wandering of their minds in religious duty distresses them. The affections which were once so active and fervent, now move slowly and reluctantly; and when they contrast their present with their past condition, it fills them with the painful apprehension, that the Spirit of God hath abandoned them, and that they have lost what God hath wrought.

As to worldly men, insipid are the scenes in which they once delighted, and intolerable are the anxieties and the cares of avarice. There is a Divine strength which is vouchsafed to the good in their decline, but worldly men are left without support to all that agitates or oppresses infirmity.

Many are the sorrows of such a period. When the body sinks into feebleness and decrepitude, the mind becomes imbecile and shattered, and is sometimes the victim of the most distracting imaginations. They who once enjoyed the full assurance of hope, have at such periods concluded that they were lost beyond remedy, and, notwithstanding the uniform piety of their former life, have considered themselves as strangers to the grace of God. In vain do religious friends try

to combat their despondency, for no light arises in the darkness. At this period the companions who used to cheer them in the journey of life are gone. To new connexions the heart cannot now open, and to the young they cannot pour out their complaint, for they deem them too giddy and inconsiderate to be the confidants of their sorrows. Often is that silence and sulkiness, which is sometimes visible in the aged, occasioned by a want of confidence in those with whom they mingle. Age is apt to be suspicious and jealous. The old, unable to shake off their gloomy impressions in the occupations of active life, or of joyous society, are left to cherish them in solitude and darkness. They are apt to suspect the motives from which the attentions they receive proceed; and what is the mere gaiety of youth, or the necessary absence of duty, is construed into a neglect of their suffering, or an insult to their grief.

Sometimes the sorrow of this period is aggravated by the unkindness of connexions longing to be rid of them. The language of upbraiding falls with peculiar harshness on the old man's ear; and the reflection is very bitter, I am now a burden to others as well as to myself. They have many dead friends to mourn over, and why should you make them fear that living friends are spared to them for a curse? Providence marks and punishes with peculiar severity cruelty to infants and cruelty to the aged. The enjoyments of the world are closing as to the aged. They are like travellers who have come to a dismal swamp, of which they cannot see the termination,

and from which they look back on the fair scenes they have quitted, but to which they know that they cannot return.

And dreadful is the sorrow of that period when the bones are full of the sins of youth; when excesses committed at that season are felt in acute pains and loathsome sores of body, or in the bitter reflections and upbraidings of conscience; when they have to look back on injuries done to others which they have left it to Providence to avenge, on opportunities of usefulness which they did not improve while they had the means of doing so, and on follies and crimes which wounded the hearts of those whom they should have honoured and blessed by their wisdom and their virtue.

O ye whose hearts are now so gay, behold in this picture what you shall feel if you should become old! The blackness of mortality shall gather over your countenance, and fears and regrets shall overwhelm your hearts. You think that ye will carry with you to old age the bright faculties, the gay hopes, and the active pursuits of youth or manhood; but then the imagination shall be clouded, the memory shall fail, and the senses shall be so blunted as to give no enjoyment. Would it be pleasant to dwell in a house whose walls were rent and bowing, whose windows were broken, and through whose shattered roof the winds blew and the rains poured down? Such a mansion is man's frame in age. "I loathe it; I would not live alway."

4. The text suggests, that when life is come to these limits, its extinction may be hourly expected. "It

is soon cut off, and we fly away." When the body is assaulted by disease in youth or manhood, the vigour of nature may maintain a long struggle with it, and it frequently triumphs over it. But what resistance can decrepitude or infirmity oppose? To hear the man of fourscore flattering himself with years to come is most preposterous. To him the language of Job is most suitable:—"My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me."* In your emaciated body death hath put in his claim to you as his victim. You may tell your friends and neighbours not to turn with disgust from your ghastly visage, for the eye that now sees you shall soon see you no more. Complain not that your ministrations to us are burdensome, for we shall soon have nought to request of you but to lay us in our grave. There is not a day in which you may not say, "I am this day going the way of all the earth;" not a night in which you may not bid adieu to the sun, and all that is done under it. Old age is a second childhood as to feebleness and helplessness, but with this difference; in childhood nature is advancing by slow degrees to vigour and maturity; but in old age the remnant of our strength is rapidly diminishing, and before the last enemy it is less than nothing.

It would be a wicked abuse of this text to consider it as justifying the neglect of suitable means of preserving life in old age, either by the aged themselves, or by their friends.

Whatever is necessary for supporting declining na-

* Job xvii. 1.

ture, and for giving rest and comfort in its infirmities, must be obtained in as far as our circumstances will admit. It is foolish to say, that life at that period is not worthy of our care. Let the young reflect when they are tempted to such conduct to the aged, what would have been their fate had their parents thought thus when they were lying weak and sickly in their cradles. That very feebleness gave you the stronger interest in a mother's heart; and let her infirmities prompt you to every affectionate attention. You were once cast on their care, now they are cast on yours.

It becomes the aged to submit to death without murmuring. We are ready to mark with indulgence their unwillingness to die, whom death is about to remove when the fairest prospects of earthly honour and felicity were opening before them, but no excuse can be made for you if, after so long a course, you still cry, "O spare me!" It is your duty to be ready for your departure, and to employ every moment that remains in cultivating the spirit of the world to which you are going, and in utility to those who are to occupy the sphere you leave. When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them even to the end, and by washing their feet gave them a proof of his benevolent condescension, and a pledge of his sanctifying grace. It is recorded of a great Roman, that, at the approach of death, he adjusted his mantle, that it might be seen, when he was no more, with what calm dignity he had submitted to his fate; but how

superior was the conduct of the Prophet, who, in the very moment of his triumphant ascension to glory, dropt his mantle to encourage the hope and to animate the zeal of his successor! To be useful till death, and to be useful in it, is the consummation of holy activity on earth.

CONCLUSION.

Let me address myself to those who have arrived, or are on the point of arriving, at these limits. The appearance of the aged in religious assemblies is useful, not only to themselves, but serves also as a memento of mortality to others. It is a most serious inquiry which we call on such persons to make,—"Have I heard so many sermons and spent so many Sabbaths in vain?" If this is the case, let not this one be added to the number. Oh! may the word be now heard by you in faith and in love, and the Sabbath be now to you the day of salvation! The holiest old man feels that he is an unprofitable servant; and let him confess this in shame and sorrow; and having much forgiven him, let him love much.

Think on the many opportunities you have had of promoting the Divine glory in comparison of others; and remember, that to whom much is given, of them also shall much be required. How insufficient and unsatisfactory do the apologies for indolence now seem with which you once silenced your consciences, and how inadequate to the claims which the cause of Christ had on you, do all your efforts for it now appear! You feel that you have no reason to call your life a well-spent life; and while there is yet time for

you to redeem, live to the Lord, and thus will you rejoice in the hope of mercy in your final account.

Labour to be still useful. If in the morning of life you sowed the seed of wisdom and pious charity, you will now have the satisfaction of seeing it yield its increase; and in its evening do not withhold your hand; and when you are numbered with the dead, it will arise and call you blessed. Think not that the counsels and efforts of the aged will be disregarded as of no value. They may be ridiculed by the self-sufficient and the presumptuous; but by all who are qualified to appreciate true wisdom and well-tried goodness, they will be regarded as rich in the spirit of Jesus, and likely to receive his testimony now and hereafter.

Remember that if you are strangers to Christ, your saving acquaintance with him must be now or never. Mercy yet waits to be gracious; and it must be criminal and foolish, in the highest degree, to delay for one moment your acceptance of its offers. You may be afraid to attempt this from fear and despair; but you thus question the sincerity and the power of a gracious Saviour, and give to the devil success in his last attempt to ruin you. The prayer of contrition never rose to him in vain.

Fret not that your life is labour and sorrow. You are wringing out the dregs of the cup of life, and they must be bitter; but from that cup you have had many a delicious draught. Let your conduct be suited to that world to which you are hastening. On your eyelids are the shadow of death; and shall you not turn them away from beholding vanity? You

stand on the brink of eternity, and things eternal should have the chief place in your thoughts, your prayers, and your conversation. Seek them above all and in every scene. You have had most excellent examples to guide you to a Christian behaviour in old age and in death. You have had these in the ministers of religion, who have spoken to you the word of God, and whose faith you ought to follow, considering the end of their conversation; and you have had them in pious neighbours, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. Live and die like them. The course of some in the world is like that of a winter's sun,—short, and obscured by clouds; and its influence on others is feeble and scanty; but the course of such men is like that of the sun when the day is longest,—shedding around a bright radiance and a cherishing warmth, and forming the clouds among which he sets to a splendour and beauty which remain after it hath gone down. The tears which are shed at such men's graves, and the blessings which are invoked on their memory, are a proof that they have neither lived nor died in vain.

Let me conclude, by addressing some exhortations to those who are yet at a distance from these limits of human life. Let those who are far advanced in years be the objects of your pity and of your kind attentions. Encourage them in their labour, and cheer them in their sorrow. Never do the young appear more amiable, than when they listen patiently to the details of the aged, request them to lean, when feeble and tottering, on their arm, and lead them gently in their slow and cheerless walks.

Trust not to the flattering voice which tells you that you also shall be old. Your companions whom you laid in the grave had similar assurances made to them; and yet you saw their breath go forth and their thoughts perish. Acquaint now yourselves with God; and if your days shall be shortened, grace shall conduct you more speedily to eternal life; and should they be prolonged to fourscore years, it will support and comfort you amidst the labour and the sorrow of the season of decay. Why is that old man so fervent in spirit serving the Lord? Why do we see him patient in tribulation and rejoicing in hope? It is because the grace of Christ is his support and consolation. Religion is the best friend both to the length and to the happiness of life. "What man is he that desireth life, and would live long, that he may see good? Refrain thy lips from evil, and thy tongue from guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it."*

Consider the diseases and afflictions which may be sent to you in the early seasons of life, as intended to remind you that death is at hand, and to induce you to submit to it cheerfully. Life is imbittered in mercy; and the months of wasting sickness which have been appointed to the young, and the violent pain by which the strength of the robust has been broken, have been the discipline of grace. Utility should be the great object we desire, recommend, and pursue in life; and may we through grace attain it. May all of us be enabled constantly to aim at

* Psalm xxxiv. 12, 13.

what is the noblest end of man,—"the advancement of the Divine glory;" and may God graciously lead us to a life of faith and of goodness, vouchsafe to us a death in peace, and raise us to an eternity of happiness. Amen.

DISCOURSE XIX.

DYING REFLECTIONS OF AN AGED SAINT.

2 TIMOTHY iv. 7. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

How various are the reflections which are made on a past life in the hour of dissolution! The crimes of the wicked man are then forced upon his view, and the arts by which he escaped from sober thought no longer avail him. Actions which he once defended against the accusations of conscience, now strike him in all their malignity; and his wretchedness demonstrates, that whatever pleasing forms vice may assume to charm the ardent mind, it will be bitterness in the end. The successful pursuit of wealth and greatness, which excites so much exultation in the worldly man himself, and so much envy in others, will not bear the serious review of a dying hour. I have sacrificed eternal happiness for acquisitions which shall now enrich others, and the honour which comes from God for a vain show. I have sought for felicity in pleasures whose enjoyment is only for a moment, but whose curse is perpetual; and have done all that I could for the prosperity of my family in this world, but I have not taken a single measure for their eternal welfare, are often the sad reflections of the closing scene. The votaries of the world make light of these reflections as the gloomy dreams of disease; but for

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Psalmist, "Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide."*

In the following discourse I shall illustrate the view here given by Paul of the labours and services of his past life; and shall then state the grounds of that exultation which he expresses in the review of it.

I. In considering the view which Paul gives of the services of life, we hear him stating, in the first place that he had "fought a good fight." In this expression he alludes to the wrestlers in the Grecian games. These games were well known throughout the ancient world; and in his travels over Greece, Paul could not but mark the interest which they excited, and the estimation in which the candidates in them were held; and he draws from them many pleasing illustrations of religious principle and duty. He had laboured for eighteen months in Corinth, in the neighbourhood in which these games were celebrated; and his allusions to them in his writings, like the reference made in the Old Testament to the natural scenery and customs of Palestine and the neighbouring countries, suggest very powerful evidences of the authenticity of the Scriptures. These games were often seen in the eye of folly, and vainglory was the ruling principle of the candidates; but Paul observed them with wisdom, and improved them for excitement and perseverance, in working out his own salvation, and promoting the salvation of others.

* Psalm xxvi. 1.

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2 Timothy iv. 7. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

How various are the reflections which are made on a past life in the hour of dissolution! The crimes of the wicked man are then forced upon his view, and the arts by which he escaped from sober thought no longer avail him. Actions which he once defended against the accusations of conscience, now strike him in all their malignity; and his wretchedness demonstrates, that whatever pleasing forms vice may assume to charm the ardent mind, it will be bitterness in the end. The successful pursuit of wealth and greatness, which excites so much exultation in the worldly man himself, and so much envy in others, will not bear the serious review of a dying hour. I have sacrificed eternal happiness for acquisitions which shall now enrich others, and the honour which comes from God for a vain show. I have sought for felicity in pleasures whose enjoyment is only for a moment, but whose curse is perpetual; and have done all that I could for the prosperity of my family in this world, but I have not taken a single measure for their eternal welfare, are often the sad reflections of the closing scene. The votaries of the world make light of these reflections as the gloomy dreams of disease; but for

ngs their hearts are preparing. They shall heard from their lips, or at least be read in the ddened countenance, which now wears the brightest mile of joy. They have been, not merely the reflections of the feeble-minded, while faithful monitors were labouring to lead them to repentance, but of persons of vigorous intellect, and who once could urge many specious pretences to vindicate their course of fe, but who now find that no sophistry can silence he charges of conscience, and are forced to bear testmony for the admonition of others, that they have rn the wind, and are now reaping the whirlwind.

But the reflections of the last hour are not all of s cast. With the good, death is cheered by recollection as well as by hope. Though some of them have left the world with the language of despondency and remorse, yet in general, amidst all the follies and all the evils of their past life, they can trace the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope; and some of them have been able to say, in the words of the text, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Some humble Christians, whose lot is cast in obscurity, and whose influence is limited to a very narrow circle, in which they are called to nothing but the calm and simple duties of ordinary life, may imagine, that it would be presumption in them to use such language as became the Apostle Paul; but it may be applied to the most retired course, and to the humblest conflict of virtue. The world may sometimes form erroneous conclusions concerning your character, but it is your privilege to say with the

Psalmist, "Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide."*

In the following discourse I shall illustrate the view here given by Paul of the labours and services of his past life; and shall then state the grounds of that exultation which he expresses in the review of it.

I. In considering the view which Paul gives of the services of life, we hear him stating, in the first place, that he had "fought a good fight." In this expression he alludes to the wrestlers in the Grecian games. These games were well known throughout the ancient world; and in his travels over Greece, Paul could not but mark the interest which they excited, and the estimation in which the candidates in them were held; and he draws from them many pleasing illustrations of religious principle and duty. He had laboured for eighteen months in Corinth, in the neighbourhood of which these games were celebrated; and his allusions to them in his writings, like the reference made in the Old Testament to the natural scenery and customs of Palestine and the neighbouring countries, suggest very powerful evidences of the authenticity of the Scriptures. These games were often seen by the eye of folly, and vainglory was the ruling principle of the candidates; but Paul observed them with wisdom, and improved them for excitement and perseverance, in working out his own salvation, and in promoting the salvation of others.

* Psalm xxvi. 1.

But who were the enemies with whom Paul had contended? His Master had sent him forth to open men's eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. He laboured to destroy the influence of the devil over the minds of others as well as over his own. He attacked him in his strongholds, the temples of idolatry, by exposing the absurd and licentious superstitions of Paganism, and preaching the worship of God in spirit and in truth. The errors by which false teachers perverted the Gospel, and the vain deceit by which the philosophy of these days opposed it, he zealously and successfully resisted. Priests rushed from their altars, and disputers from their schools, to confound him, but they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake. The philosophers at Athens could bring forward nothing which bore the semblance of argument in opposition to his statements, and had recourse to the vulgar expedient of ridicule as their only answer. The fierce bigotry of the Jews he resisted by the soft answer of prudence and charity; and the advocates whom they employed to represent and to revile his principles and conduct, he silenced by the simple but powerful eloquence of truth and innocence.

Sin, in all its forms, he laboured to destroy in himself as well as in others. Pure was the morality which he preached, and watchful was the life which he led. What he held out to others as the great remedy for guilt and pollution, he improved for himself, even the blood of the cross, and the sanctification of the Spirit. Vices generally practised, sup-

ported by the most plausible pretences, and indulged in by those whose favour was of the most importance to him, he never excused. The seventh chapter of the Romans presents to us a most interesting and faithful detail of his struggles with indwelling sin, and has perhaps been the most useful part of his writings to those who know the plagues of their own hearts. While it lays the confidence of enthusiasm in the dust, it suggests effectual consolation to the trembling penitent. The mode in which he reproves the contentions of the Corinthians, and the instability and defections of the members of the church in Galatia, shows his fidelity as a servant of Christ; while the manner in which he exposed the vices of Felix and Drusilla, and warned them of a judgment to come, proves that his zeal against wickedness was superior to all the terrors of power, and that he could not flatter a transgressor though his life was in his hand. He contended also with the world; he relinquished all its flattering prospects, and all its gains he laid down at the Saviour's feet; his talents and acquirements might have raised him to the highest distinctions in Judea, but he gave up all that its priests could promise him most readily, that he might go out to Christ without the camp bearing his reproach. Nothing can more strikingly show his deadness to all in the world that is most captivating to the carnal mind, and the principles by whose operations it had been produced, than his language,—"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is cruci-

fied to me and I to the world."* Once its honours were most eagerly desired by his ardent mind, and it was not over a sluggish and abject temper, but over one bold, impetuous, and lofty, that the Spirit of the cross had triumphed. He had to fight with the enmity of the world; he had to fight with wild beasts at Ephesus. This may be understood of his contending there with opponents as irrational and as furious as the fiercest animals of the desert; or, according to the horrid custom of those times, when prisoners were brought out into areas, the wild beasts were let loose on them, and they had to defend themselves, or they would have been torn in pieces, he was forced to combat with them. He says,—"I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as persons appointed to death, that we are made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men."† In the theatrical spectacles criminals, to whom they gave a chance of victory, fought armed in the morning with wild beasts, but in the afternoon they were exposed unarmed, and seldom did any escape. Now, Paul's comparing himself and his brethren to those devoted persons, strikingly shows the dangers and struggles of their lot. He was in stripes above measure, thrice was he beaten with rods, in prisons more frequent, and in deaths oft.

Now, on those contests Paul looked back with exultation; his struggle had not been in vain; and he had approved himself a good soldier of Jesus Christ. What was said of Saul and Jonathan was true of him

* Gal. vi. 14. † 1 Cor. iv. 9.

in a spiritual sense:—"From the blood of the slain, and from the fat of the mighty, his bow returned not back, his sword returned not empty." He looked back, and saw the shields of the mighty cast away, their strongholds in ruins, their adherents confounded, and the banners of the cross waving triumphant.

The wrestlers in the ancient games had to contend with men like themselves. Arm was opposed to arm, and soon was the contest over; but Paul had to oppose bands of evil men and legions of devils, and the contest had continued for years. He was now a veteran in Christ's army, and had grown grey in his service; he had many scars of wounds which he had received. "From henceforth," says he, "let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."* The Apostle is supposed to allude in this remarkable expression, to those servants in the heathen temples on whose foreheads the name of the god whom they served was burned, and it is as if he had said,—"The bruises of violence and cruelty which I have received in the service of Christ will be upon me till I go down to my grave, and claim for me the courtesy and kindness of all who worship him." He has been thought by others to insinuate that those marks of suffering for Christ were much better proofs of his being his servant, than the mark of circumcision of which the false teachers boasted was a proof of their being God's servants.

Ye are called, Christians, to a similar warfare. Ye must resist the devil, oppose the movements of indwelling sin, and overcome the world. Your evil

* Gal. vi. 17.

passions must be subjected to Christ. The proud heart must be laid low, the angry and stubborn spirit must become gentle and easy to be entreated. The heart that is apt to yield to every suggestion of fear or worldly hope, must be established in the firmness of integrity, and every envious feeling be banished by a benevolent delight in the prosperity of others. Whether Satan endeavours to flatter you into presumption, to entice you to impurity, to inflame you with malice, or to drive you to despair, you must resist him steadfast in the faith; you must set yourselves against the foolish and wicked customs and practices of the world, however they may be recommended by general use, or be sanctioned by the observance of those who have not resolution sufficient to be singular. You must keep yourselves unspotted from the world; and in acting thus the Apostle's exultation shall, in some measure, be yours. The exultation of the successful warrior is sometimes checked by the feelings of humanity sighing over the slaughter of brethren, and the remonstrances of conscience against the injustice of his cause. Gladly would he at such a moment accept of a laurel less verdant which no blood watered, a triumph less splendid which no curses followed.

Sometimes success is imbittered by the remembrance of the sinful methods by which victory was gained. The conqueror may have it in his power to keep them from being presented to his eye by his associates, but there are persons jealous of his fame who will exhibit them in the blackest colours. They will be set in order before him in the accusations of his conscience; and he feels that its verdict will be

that of impartial posterity, when the blaze of triumph has passed away, and the motives to screen successful villany can operate no longer. But in the conflict of righteousness there is neither fraud nor deceit. Your fight is a good fight. The Captain of Salvation is your leader; your enemies are the foes of human happiness, and your armour is the armour of God. You fight by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, and by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left; your cause is the cause of truth and virtue; your associates are the excellent of the earth; your standard is the cross; and your reward is the crown of righteousness.

2. The Apostle tells us, that he had finished his course. He alludes here to the races in the ancient games, and compares the services of the holy ministry and the exercises of the Christian life to a race. His course had been marked out for him; and it was not over a path smooth and level, but in many places it was steep and rugged. Fierce blasts assailed him, yet still he held on his way. He was sometimes afflicted by the apostacy of those whom he regarded as his companions; the corruption of the heart demanded repose, and urged him to lie down and to slumber; and he was occasionally harassed by fear lest he should come short of the prize, and be ranked with those who, having begun in the spirit, end in the flesh. There were seasons in which the pride and indolence of the heart suggested to him that he had far outstripped others, and that farther exertions were un-

necessary; yet humility and holy wisdom repressed such conceits, and made him resolve, that while he had a moment to live it should be devoted to progress in goodness. Now he saw the prize clearly before him. Sometimes during the race he had seen it distinctly, at other times a cloud had covered it from his view, but now he beheld it in all its brightness and glory, and a few steps more would bring him to the goal where it was placed.

He had, by the grace of God, been suitably prepared for this course, and had carefully observed the statutes of Heaven respecting it. In this epistle he remarks, in manifest allusion to those games, "If a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully."* He had kept the appointed path, neither turning to the right hand nor to the left. This had been the great object of his wish, not that his career might be easy, or that it might be attended with honour or emolument to himself, but that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus; and that desire was to be fulfilled, for it was closed in joy unspeakable. Though he died as the victim of persecution, he had the amplest testimony which conscience could pay, the strongest solace which religion could impart, and the fairest memorial which gratitude could bestow.

Christians, you are engaged in the race of goodness. You have said to the Most High,—"I will run the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged

* 2 Tim. ii. 5.

my heart;" and be steady to this solemn pledge. Turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. The path in which the wicked are moving may seem more pleasant and easy than yours, but it leads to destruction. The racer seeks not for roses in his path, and stops not to listen either to the singing of birds or to the howling of the winds; his eye is on the goal and on the prize; and so run that ye may obtain. They do it to obtain a corruptible, but you an incorruptible crown; and, unlike these racers, your vigour shall increase as you advance, and not with languor or exhaustion, but with a spirit strong in the faith, giving glory to God, shall your labours close. You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, earnestly desirous that you may go on to perfection. They have obtained their Master's approbation and reward, and in this they wish you to share; nay, instead of exciting envy, it would delight them to see your Master more honoured by you than he had been by them; and in consequence of this your approbation more ample and your reward more glorious. The racer who should abandon the course in disgust, fear, or despair, would lose all the advantage or credit of his previous progress; and were you to stop short, your former attainments would go for nothing, and be rejected as a vain show.

3. He declares that he had kept the faith. By the faith we may understand the doctrines of the Gospel which had been committed to him; and what he was so anxious Timothy should do ha
" O Timothy, keep that which i
trust, avoiding profane and vain b

sitions of science falsely so called: which some professing, have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee."* This is the farewell counsel of his first epistle to him, and it shows the importance he attached to it, and his anxiety about it. That faith he had kept pure and uncorrupted; no sophistry could beguile him into error, and no violence could awe him into a concealment of the truth. His noble declaration to the Romans had been his uniform feeling,—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Wherever he had gone he had carried this sacred deposite with him. It had been the light of his journeys, the solace of his toils, and the sum of his ministry. He had kept it more watchfully than the miser guards his gold, and grasped it more firmly than the drowning man clings to the plank of safety.

Paul had held fast the profession of his faith without wavering. He had taken it with him to synagogues, to councils, and to prisons, and now he was to take it to the scaffold, and to put his seal to it in suffering martyrdom. The longer he had studied it, he saw it to be more replete with grace and truth; and the more he compared it with every other system, the more he was struck with its infinite superiority. He could find no terms too high to express his attachment to it, as the glorious Gospel of the blessed God; and so far from being shaken in that attachment by what he had suffered, it was endeared to him the more by all that he endured for its sake. To Timothy he could give this counsel, as tending both to his honour

* 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.

and his happiness, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God."*

Thus, Christians, must you hold fast the faith. In the present day some are making shipwreck of the faith and of a good conscience, relinquishing the Gospel, not at the threat of persecution, or the sight of scaffolds, but at the laughter of fools and the cavils of blasphemers; but continue ye in the things which you have learned, knowing of whom you have learned them. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."† The Gospel shall shed the sweetest comfort over the close of a life marked by adherence to its doctrines, and it shall bless its whole tenor. You shall find a pleasure in them never experienced in any other topics, and their influence on holiness of heart and life is such as nought can counteract or supply. Your steadfast attachment to your religious principles may be styled bigotry and prejudice by the freethinkers of the age, but ye can give a reason for the hope that is in you, which they cannot refute by fair argument, and which they attempt in vain to discredit by the low sarcasms of a foolish petulance. Wisdom is justified of her children.

But we may understand this expression as referring to that fidelity and integrity in which Paul had been enabled to live. He had exercised himself always to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man. No prospect of honour, no dread of offending

* 2 Tim. i. 8. † John viii. 31.

his best friends, no regard for his safety, could make him swerve in one instance from the path of uprightness, or screen from censure those who had done so. We have an admirable instance of this in the epistle to the Galatians:—"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"* When we think on the high reputation of Peter, and on the various considerations which a worldly prudence might have suggested against finding fault with the conduct of such a man, we must admit, that the strength and delicacy of honourable feeling displayed by Paul were truly noble. But this was not a rare instance of uprightness; he had lived in all good conscience till this day, and could say with Hezekiah, "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and done that which is good in thy sight." Hezekiah, appalled by the prospect of death, wept sore; but Paul rejoices in hope of the glory of God.

* Gal. ii. 11—14.

Let it be your resolution, my friends, that you will hold fast your integrity. The aged have been sometimes charged with low cunning, and some of them have had recourse to artifice to gain a favourite object. Their experience of the world renders them cold and cautious. It would be honourable for their profession, as well as happy for themselves, did they maintain that candid and ingenuous manner so amiable in youth, and which, were it exhibited in old age, would ensure them the confidence of the young, and more effectually promote the interests about which they are solicitous, than all the precautions of the deepest policy.

II. I proceed now to state the grounds of that exultation which Paul expresses in reviewing his past life. We cannot suppose that he regarded these acts as entitling him to the rewards of glory. In all his epistles he expresses his entire dependence on the righteousness of Christ. There never was a more determined enemy to the legal temper in all its workings than the Apostle Paul; and we cannot suppose that he would now express or cherish a feeling in direct contradiction to his whole doctrine as a preacher, and to his whole experience as a Christian.

Neither are we to imagine that there was nothing in his conduct, since his conversion, which he saw reason to regret. In his first epistle to Timothy he thus expresses himself:—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the

chief."* While the voice of an admiring church applauded and still applauds him as the first of saints, he speaks of himself in the humblest style of abasement and contrition. No candid reader can ever imagine that his language is that of affectation. There is an air of sincerity and candour about it which convinces us that it comes from the heart; and never was there a man more zealous for Christ's honour and less solicitous for his own. But he saw such manifestations of Divine influence, in his course of duty and obedience, as claimed his grateful acknowledgment while he lived on earth, and his song of praise when he had entered into rest.

1. Paul reflects on his labours and services with satisfaction, on account of the glory redounding from them to God. It was his earnest expectation, and his hope, as he expresses it in his epistle to the Philippians, that Christ should be magnified in his body in life and in death. Now that hope was realized. The battles he had fought, and the victories he had won, were in Christ's cause. The enemies he had subdued were his enemies, and the converts he had made had swelled his ranks and extended his empire. In the duties of obedience he had shown forth the virtues of him who had called him out of darkness into his marvellous light. In keeping the faith he had maintained and spread abroad that gospel which is the testimony of our Lord, which declares his glory among the heathen, and his wonders among all people.

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* 1 Tim. i. 15.

He had taught multitudes to know him, and won multitudes to serve him.

Besides, the power and grace of Christ were strikingly displayed in accomplishing such objects by means so feeble. It was Divine power alone which made him defy such danger, enabled such weak hands to hold fast the faith in spite of all the attempts made to wrest it from him, and caused languid nature to endure to the end. The soldier exults in every victory that is gained, if it will add a new title of honour to his commander's name, or secure for his ashes a more honourable monument; and shall not good men exult in those labours of love, in that fight of faith, in that purity which vice could not ensnare, and in that devotion which elevated the soul, by all which the name of our Lord Jesus is glorified in us, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ? "The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds: casting down imagination, and every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought in subjection to the obedience of faith."*

2. Paul reflects on them with satisfaction, on account of the advantages which resulted from them to the world and to the church. He had given in various places a fatal blow to those superstitions and vices by which the nations were enslaved, opened channels among the heathen in which the waters of life should flow, destroyed the influence of those principles which

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

kept multitudes in the bondage of corruption, and had spread more extensively, than any other, that religion which was to break the fetters of the slave, banish the abominations of Pagan impurity from the earth, refine and bless the intercourse of domestic life, and in due time unite the kingdoms of the earth in harmony. He had increased the members of the church, his example had invigorated their fortitude; he had been the happy instrument of settling differences, repressing false teachers, and comforting the saints under the afflictions of the gospel. No instability, no error, and no misconduct of his, had shaken the minds of the disciples, or made the ways of God to be evil spoken of. Well, therefore, might the Apostle rejoice, that the grace bestowed on him had not been in vain, and that the present and succeeding generations should reap what he had sown in tears. Thus may Christians, in the obscurest situations, rejoice in the influence of the fruits of the Spirit in them, however limited. The plant which grows in the desert has had its fragrance wafted to a distance by the breeze, and its seeds borne to a more favoured soil, where they have had an abundant increase.

3. Paul reflected on his past labours with satisfaction, on account of their happy influence as to himself. By these fruits of holiness his calling and his election were made sure, and he had the fullest assurance that the Spirit of Christ dwelt in him. Besides, there is a pleasure in the testimony of conscience to well doing, which no worldly enjoyment can impart. "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of

our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."* The language undoubtedly intimates, that though this was not their only, it was not the least of their joys. By the constitution of Heaven the practice of religion yields the purest delight, and the more complete we stand in the will of God the more blissful is its influence. The racer's progress fatigues him as he advances, the warrior's struggles subject him to bruises and wounds; but every step the Christian moves in his race his joy advances, and every conflict yields him sweeter rest to the soul.

It was a most gratifying thought to Paul, that his memory should live in the church, and that the purest honours of enlightened gratitude should be paid to his name. If, of the woman who poured the precious ointment on our Lord's head, he said, "That wherever the gospel was preached what she had done should be told for a memorial of her," this must be true of him who brought so many blessings to the head of Jesus from those who were ready to perish, and who poured his life's blood at his feet.

Paul too regarded these services as proofs of his meetness for the future reward. Looking at them, and at the promise connecting holiness with glory, he could exclaim,—"The warrior's palm, the racer's prize, and the confessor's crown are mine!" yet while he said this, the language which follows shows that his heart was adding,—"They are mine for his sake,

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

and they shall be mine from his hands of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things."

CONCLUSION.

It is probable that some advanced in life may be now saying in their hearts,—"The review of my past life presents me with no such grounds of exultation; I have done nothing for God, and when I think what I have done against him, I feel that no language so well becomes me as this,—Innumerable evils compass me about, mine iniquities have taken hold on me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me;"—but beware lest, in the gloom of your despondency, you deny or overlook what God hath done for your souls. Look back to the scene in which you offended God, and do you see in that scene no traces of the tears of contrition, no marks which point out the path by which you returned to him? Look back on the season of spiritual darkness, and mark the patience with which you waited on God, and the earnestness with which you cried to him. Look back on the time of your affliction, and remember your songs in the night, the firmness with which you repelled every suggestion of despair, and the abhorrence with which you regarded every temptation to seek relief by unlawful methods. These are some of the characters of grace. You are ashamed that there are not more; be grateful that there are any. Who hath despised the day of small things? God will not, neither should you.

Be more active than ever during the little of life

that remains. With more leisure than ever for devotion, shall you pray less? With ample reasons for thanksgiving, shall your songs be fewer? If you cannot be so active in public duty, be more humble and penitent, meek and heavenly-minded. And let not those, who are looking back from old age on their past life with some emotions of complacency, be high-minded, but fear. Presumption will put you off your guard, and expose you to failures which will cover you with shame and confusion. Let your whole deportment proclaim, as well as your words, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give the glory for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake."

Let me address a few exhortations to those who have made but small progress in the Christian life. Let the Apostle's feelings encourage you to persevere in that path whose close is marked by such delightful reflections. Contrast with them the horrible reflections of the apostate, and the gloom which darkens his last hour. The man who has lost a battle by his cowardice, or who has deserted the standard of his general, must hide his head from the scorn of the world; but far more bitter are his feelings who has turned from the Captain of Salvation to his enemies. It is impossible that he who errs from the faith can be happy. The arrows which he throws pierce his own heart, and the brands which he tosses kindle the fire of hell within him. The principles which have been rejected with scorn will not come to be the comforters of a death-bed, and the opportunities of salvation, and of doing good, which he hath lost, will rise

to his mind to increase the terrors of the angel's voice, when he swears that "there shall be time no longer." Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Let unconverted men consider that they are fighting against God, and opposing his plans for their salvation. You suppress the movements of his Spirit, and overpower the struggles of conscience. You are aiding Satan in his rebellious devices, and are led captive by him at his will. You cannot expect to prosper in such a contest. Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle, I would go through them, I would burn them up together. Ye run to the excess of riot, and while ye do so ye are hastening to destruction; and your rejection of the faith of the gospel leaves you no other prospect but that of dying in your sins, and of perdition without remedy. You may hear this with unconcern, but you shall mourn at the last when your flesh and your body are consumed; and, amidst the agonies of the place of misery, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth at the remembrance of a life of folly and vice. It is neither wise to live nor safe to die in sin. Receive the truth in the love of it, be ye reconciled to God, and begin this very moment the race of righteousness in deep contrition, holy purposes, and solemn dedication of yourselves to the Redeemer's cause and service, and may he enable you to serve him with zeal and fidelity, in holiness and in righteousness, before him all the days of your life. Amen.

DISCOURSE XX.

DYING PROSPECTS OF AN AGED SAINT.

2 TIMOTHY iv. 8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

THE prospects which have excited the exultation of men fall far below the one which the text describes. The gay and splendid visions which rise before the fleshly mind produce only a momentary rapture. Reason soon detects their uncertainty and their emptiness, while a higher principle condemns them as base and carnal. The efforts made to realize such expectations have occupied the time and the faculties which should be devoted to nobler objects, and led, in many cases, to deeds which have involved men in shame and perdition. In cases where they have been realized, how rarely have they been felt worthy of the fondness with which they have been cherished, of the exertions which they demanded, and of the attention which they engrossed? No prospects of earthly enjoyment can remain when calamity and danger approach; they quickly pass away, and leave their place to be occupied by the darkest forebodings; and that same liveliness of imagination, which clothes

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[illegible] hope in colours so beautiful, never fails [illegible] aggravate the evils of disappointment, and to exhi- [illegible] the object of dread in the most hideous form, and [illegible] advance as near and certain.

How different are the prospects of religion! They will bear the strictest examination, and their influence [illegible] given the heart rest amid the violence of persecution, and made the scaffold of death seem the threshold of glory. Such was their influence on the heart of Paul. He saw a violent death before him, and beheld the axe whetting which was to sever his head from his body; but he looks beyond the scaffold to the throne which was prepared for him, and to the crown held by the righteous Judge to be placed where his love had destined it. Having described his emotions in the work of his Master in language taken from the contests in the Grecian games, he holds out the honours of the blessed by the rewards of the victors. The Apostle had witnessed the interest excited by these prizes among all classes, and especially he had marked their power in the efforts of the candidates as they drew near the goal, and such was the [illegible] of the heavenly glory on his mind. The [illegible] these games with a vivid remembrance of [illegible] could no longer make, and marked the [illegible] regret that for them they could not con- [illegible] the aged Christian, like the Apostle, is still [illegible] and pressing forward, and it is his privi- [illegible] can regard himself as nearest to the

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object of Paul's expectation, to his impressions and hopes respecting it, and to the character of those who shall share with him in this glory.

I. Let us attend to the object of Paul's expectation.

1. It is described as a crown. In the Olympic games the victors were rewarded with crowns by the judges who were appointed to decide on the merits of the different candidates; and though these crowns were made of the leaves or branches of trees, they were supposed to confer such honour, that they were sought with the keenest ardour of ambition. The greatest princes, and the most successful generals, were eager to enrol their names among the candidates, and conceived that the honours awarded to the victors were necessary to complete their glory and their happiness; while those of inferior rank considered the attainment of the Olympic garland as an ample compensation for the meanness of their lot, and as adding a lustre to their name, which should distinguish their posterity.

The glory of the heavenly state is the reward of those who have run with patience the race set before them, and who have wrestled with spiritual wickedness in high places; and it is not made of perishing plants, but of the tree of life, and its verdure never decays. The possessors of these ancient crowns had various privileges and distinctions connected with them; and with the crown of which the text speaks are associated a seat on the Saviour's throne, a kingdom that cannot be moved, and pleasures evermore. The distinctions connected with success in these ga

were earthly in their nature, and limited in their extent. It was only to some principles of our nature that they were adapted, and these they could not long gratify; but the honours of the heavenly world are pure and sublime, fitted to delight every faculty we possess, and subject to no decay of attraction, no failure in power, and no change in security.

This glory shall distinguish the whole man. Jesus hath more power to improve and to adorn than death hath to deface and degrade. The body shall be more beautiful in heaven than ever it was loathsome in the grave; and what was the victim of the worm shall put on immortality. The soul shall rise to gratitude more ardent, to an exultation more triumphant, a communion more intimate, and an affection more tender, than that of spirits who never were the objects of redeeming love. Then its knowledge shall be so clear and extensive, that what perplexed the mind in the present scene shall appear the admirable arrangement of Divine wisdom; and the love whose coldness gave them so much uneasiness, and excited so many fears of its final extinction, shall then never know a wandering thought, or a languid moment, but shall occupy every feeling and power on that object whose presence is all its desire, and whose favour is all its felicity.

The enjoyment arising from those Grecian crowns was often marred by envy at the more brilliant successes of others, and by the fear that, in the novelty of succeeding competitions, they should be forgotten; but perfect love in heaven precludes all such feelings. The heads which wore these ancient crowns were

nce laid low; the swiftest racer was overtaken eath, and the most athletic wrestler thrown down im; but this is a crown of life: it is the pledge mmortality, and death is one of the enemies over nom its possessors shall for ever triumph.

2. It is called a crown of righteousness. This was not the title of any of these Olympic crowns. They could only be thus styled in a very inferior sense, as bestowed in strict accordance with the laws of these games on those who were justly entitled to them by their superior vigour and activity; but there are a variety of reasons why this epithet is attached to the object of the Christian's hope.

It is purchased by the righteousness of Christ. Glory so great could only be obtained in a method consistent with the character of that God in whose presence it is enjoyed. To gain for man what he could never have secured for himself, Jesus obeyed the precepts and endured the penalty of the law, and to bring many sons to glory, the Captain of salvation was made perfect through sufferings. His righteousness imputed to them saves them from the hell into which they were sinking, and raises them to the heaven to which no human being could ever have ascended without it. In earthly crowns we see the sovereignty of that mighty One by whom kings reign and princes decree justice; but on this crown of righteousness we see the merit of Christ's precious blood. The crowns won in these games were worn by the victors in proud exultation; but this crown is cast, by the just made perfect, at the Saviour's feet, through whose righteousness they feel, and shall ac-

s mind to increase the terrors of the angel's voice, n he swears that "there shall be time no longer." watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, are ready to die; for I have not found thy works before God.

Let unconverted men consider that they are fighting st God, and opposing his plans for their salvation. ress the movements of his Spirit, and over- s of conscience. You are aiding Satan us devices, and are led captive by him at Y cannot expect to prosper in such a con- Who would set the briers and thorns against battle, I would go through them, I would burn up together. Ye run to the excess of riot, and do so ye are hastening to destruction; and tion of the faith of the gospel leaves you no other prospect but that of dying in your sins, and of perdition without remedy. You may hear this with unconcern, but you shall mourn at the last when your flesh and your body are consumed; and, amidst the agonies of the place of misery, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth at the remembrance of a life of folly and vice. It is neither wise to live nor safe to die in sin. Receive the truth in the love of it, be ye reconciled to God, and begin this very moment the race of righteousness in deep contrition, holy purposes, and solemn dedication of yourselves to the Redeemer's cause and service, and may he enable you to serve him with zeal and fidelity, in holiness and in righteousness, before him all the days of your life. Amen.

It is called a crown of righteousness, because it is glory marked by perfect rectitude. The soul and body thus honoured are pure as Christ is pure. There no selfishness ever impedes the movements of benevolence, and there envy never mars the happiness of any one individual, or imbitters that of his neighbour. There no languor ever lowers the swell of devotion, and no fear disturbs that repose into which confidence in God settles the spirit; there no unruly and sensual appetite can harass the soul by its claims, or betray it by its solicitations; and there no evil passion can be excited in the heart. We think with wonder of angels untainted in purity amidst all their intercourse with imperfect beings, and ardent in benevolence, notwithstanding the unworthy returns made to them for their kindness; but the blessed in heaven shall be exposed to no such trials, and, though they were, they could not be corrupted. Moral excellence was by no means necessarily connected with the crowns obtained in the Grecian games. It was to bodily activity, not to virtuous energy, that the prize was due. It might be worn by one who was addicted to evil practices, and who might abuse his honours for the purpose of faction and deceit; but this glory shall be enjoyed by those who behold God's face in righteousness, and shall be reflected on him who remembered them in their low estate, raised them from the dust, set them among princes, and made them inherit the throne of glory.

I may state, as another reason of the title here given to this crown, that it is glory we come to in the way of righteousness. Men often rise to earthly distinc-

to his mind to increase the terrors of the angel's voice, when he swears that "there shall be time no longer." Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Let unconverted men consider that they are fighting against God, and opposing his plans for their salvation. You suppress the movements of his Spirit, and overpower the struggles of conscience. You are aiding Satan in his rebellious devices, and are led captive by him at his will. You cannot expect to prosper in such a contest. Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle, I would go through them, I would burn them up together. Ye run to the excess of riot, and while ye do so ye are hastening to destruction; and your rejection of the faith of the gospel leaves you no other prospect but that of dying in your sins, and of perdition without remedy. You may hear this with unconcern, but you shall mourn at the last when your flesh and your body are consumed; and, amidst the agonies of the place of misery, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth at the remembrance of a life of folly and vice. It is neither wise to live nor safe to die in sin. Receive the truth in the love of it, be ye reconciled to God, and begin this very moment the race of righteousness in deep contrition, holy purposes, and solemn dedication of yourselves to the Redeemer's cause and service, and may he enable you to serve him with zeal and fidelity, in holiness and in righteousness, before him all the days of your life. Amen.

ness, by believing that it would be bestowed, in opposition to every dark suggestion of the tempter, and of his own despondence, shall glorify it by the testimony they will bear in the actual enjoyment of it, "that not one assurance has failed amidst promises so numerous and so varied." Their accomplishment shall fulfil all their hopes as to certainty, and exceed them as to felicity and glory. "The heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord; thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints." Here the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the righteous have sometimes shaken the faith of men, but then it will be seen that the afflictions of the good had wrought for them an exceeding great and an eternal weight of glory. These crowns are formed of gold purified in the furnace of affliction, and these palms are taken from trees transplanted from the valley of tears.

II. Let us now consider the statement which is here given of Paul's impressions and hopes with regard to this crown.

1. He believed that at present it was laid up for him. It was kept in readiness for him in the treasury of heaven, and under the charge of that Redeemer to whom he had committed his immortal soul and all its interests; and in the power and love of this Guardian he knew that it was perfectly safe. The crowns of earthly kings have been stolen by the thief breaking into the chamber where they were deposited; and often have they been carried away, along with the other spoil of palaces, by successful enemies; but this crown is laid up where moth and rust cannot cor-

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pressed by Paul; for he had the peculiar influence of the Spirit of glory. He was caught up to paradise, and saw this crown; but it would be presumption for saints of an ordinary character to use such language. To this it may be replied, that this persuasion is attainable by Christians, in all ages, in the exercise of the graces by which Paul obtained it. His faith in the blood, and his hope in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, led to this conclusion:—He who died to win this crown for me will not withhold it; He who hath given me the earnest of it in the Spirit of glory will not deny it; and He who hath been preparing me for it by the discipline of the cross, and by the means of salvation, will put me in possession of it. And while the Apostle speaks in the text in personal terms of his own assurance, he, in other places of Scripture, represents himself as exercising it along with his fellow Christians,—"We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* This assurance was not his privilege as an Apostle, but as a saint, and it especially blessed his last days. The heir-apparent of an earthly crown may be disappointed of it in a variety of ways, but the hope of glory cherished by the good maketh not ashamed.

2. He expected that the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give it to him at the day of judgment. At death the soul passes into glory, but the full felicity of the believer is reserved till Christ's coming. Then

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

to his mind to increase the terrors of the angel's voice, when he swears that "there shall be time no longer." Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Let unconverted men consider that they are fighting against God, and opposing his plans for their salvation. You suppress the movements of his Spirit, and overpower the struggles of conscience. You are aiding Satan in his rebellious devices, and are led captive by him at his will. You cannot expect to prosper in such a contest. Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle, I would go through them, I would burn them up together. Ye run to the excess of riot, and while ye do so ye are hastening to destruction; and your rejection of the faith of the gospel leaves you no other prospect but that of dying in your sins, and of perdition without remedy. You may hear this with unconcern, but you shall mourn at the last when your flesh and your body are consumed; and, amidst the agonies of the place of misery, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth at the remembrance of a life of folly and vice. It is neither wise to live nor safe to die in sin. Receive the truth in the love of it, be ye reconciled to God, and begin this very moment the race of righteousness in deep contrition, holy purposes, and solemn dedication of yourselves to the Redeemer's cause and service, and may he enable you to serve him with zeal and fidelity, in holiness and in righteousness, before him all the days of your life. Amen.

Judge? To this we reply, that he looked for his mercy in a way perfectly consistent with this character of the Judge. He did not claim this crown as his due in consequence of his toils and virtues, his sufferings and martyrdom, but expected it as a gift. He will give it to me, as if he had said, as a pledge of his love. Much have these hands already conferred, but this they will yet bestow; much have these lips expressed, but to me they will yet say,—"Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The Lord, the righteous Judge, comes, but he comes as the Lord our righteousness. He comes in glory, and the most splendid honours are not too bright for him; but he comes also in love, and I will look for his mercy to eternal life; he comes quickly, but his rewards are with him. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

The wicked can only think calmly of the judgment when they fancy the Judge disposed to be indulgent to human frailties, and reluctant to condemn; but how would such procedure accord with his holy character, and with his appointment by the Father to judge the world in righteousness? and what would angels think of such a scene? But the good, knowing that they shall be found in him, can sing,—"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord; for he cometh, he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the

to his mind to increase the terrors of the angel's voice, when he swears that "there shall be time no longer." Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

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DISCOURSE XX.

DYING PROSPECTS OF AN AGED SAINT.

2 TIMOTHY iv. 8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

THE prospects which have excited the exultation of men fall far below the one which the text describes. The gay and splendid visions which rise before the fleshly mind produce only a momentary rapture. Reason soon detects their uncertainty and their emptiness, while a higher principle condemns them as base and carnal. The efforts made to realize such expectations have occupied the time and the faculties which should be devoted to nobler objects, and led, in many cases, to deeds which have involved men in shame and perdition. In cases where they have been realized, how rarely have they been felt worthy of the fondness with which they have been cherished, of the exertions which they demanded, and of the attention which they engrossed? No prospects of earthly enjoyment can remain when calamity and danger approach; they quickly pass away, and leave their place to be occupied by the darkest forebodings; and that same liveliness of imagination, which clothes

the object of hope in colours so beautiful, never fails to aggravate the evils of disappointment, and to exhibit the object of dread in the most hideous form, and its advance as near and certain.

How different are the prospects of religion! They will bear the strictest examination, and their influence hath given the heart rest amid the violence of persecution, and made the scaffold of death seem the threshold of glory. Such was their influence on the heart of Paul. He saw a violent death before him, and beheld the axe whetting which was to sever his head from his body; but he looks beyond the scaffold to the throne which was prepared for him, and to the crown held by the righteous Judge to be placed where his love had destined it. Having described his exertions in the work of his Master in language taken from the contests in the Grecian games, he holds out the honours of the blessed by the rewards of the victors. The Apostle had witnessed the interest excited by these prizes among all classes, and especially he had marked their power in the efforts of the candidates as they drew near the goal, and such was the influence of the heavenly glory on his mind. The old saw these games with a vivid remembrance of efforts they could no longer make, and marked the prizes with regret that for them they could not contend; but the aged Christian, like the Apostle, is still struggling and pressing forward, and it is his privilege that he can regard himself as nearest to the prize.

In this discourse I shall call your attention to the

object of Paul's expectation, to his impressions and hopes respecting it, and to the character of those who shall share with him in this glory.

I. Let us attend to the object of Paul's expectation.

1. It is described as a crown. In the Olympic games the victors were rewarded with crowns by the judges who were appointed to decide on the merits of the different candidates; and though these crowns were made of the leaves or branches of trees, they were supposed to confer such honour, that they were sought with the keenest ardour of ambition. The greatest princes, and the most successful generals, were eager to enrol their names among the candidates, and conceived that the honours awarded to the victors were necessary to complete their glory and their happiness; while those of inferior rank considered the attainment of the Olympic garland as an ample compensation for the meanness of their lot, and as adding a lustre to their name, which should distinguish their posterity.

The glory of the heavenly state is the reward of those who have run with patience the race set before them, and who have wrestled with spiritual wickednesses in high places; and it is not made of perishing plants, but of the tree of life, and its verdure never decays. The possessors of these ancient crowns had various privileges and distinctions connected with them; and with the crown of which the text speaks are associated a seat on the Saviour's throne, a kingdom that cannot be moved, and pleasures evermore. The distinctions connected with success in these games

were earthly in their nature, and limited in their extent. It was only to some principles of our nature that they were adapted, and these they could not long gratify; but the honours of the heavenly world are pure and sublime, fitted to delight every faculty we possess, and subject to no decay of attraction, no failure in power, and no change in security.

This glory shall distinguish the whole man. Jesus hath more power to improve and to adorn than death hath to deface and degrade. The body shall be more beautiful in heaven than ever it was loathsome in the grave; and what was the victim of the worm shall put on immortality. The soul shall rise to gratitude more ardent, to an exultation more triumphant, a communion more intimate, and an affection more tender, than that of spirits who never were the objects of redeeming love. Then its knowledge shall be so clear and extensive, that what perplexed the mind in the present scene shall appear the admirable arrangement of Divine wisdom; and the love whose coldness gave them so much uneasiness, and excited so many fears of its final extinction, shall then never know a wandering thought, or a languid moment, but shall occupy every feeling and power on that object whose presence is all its desire, and whose favour is all its felicity.

The enjoyment arising from those Grecian crowns was often marred by envy at the more brilliant successes of others, and by the fear that, in the novelty of succeeding competitions, they should be forgotten; but perfect love in heaven precludes all such feelings. The heads which wore these ancient crowns were

long since laid low; the swiftest racer was overtaken by death, and the most athletic wrestler thrown down by him; but this is a crown of life: it is the pledge of immortality, and death is one of the enemies over whom its possessors shall for ever triumph.

2. It is called a crown of righteousness. This was not the title of any of these Olympic crowns. They could only be thus styled in a very inferior sense, as bestowed in strict accordance with the laws of these games on those who were justly entitled to them by their superior vigour and activity; but there are a variety of reasons why this epithet is attached to the object of the Christian's hope.

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knowledge, with the utmost readiness and delight, that grace reigned to their eternal life.

It is so styled, because it is a token of God's gracious approbation of the believer's personal righteousness. Imperfect as the services of the saints are, God is pleased to testify his approbation of them by bestowing on earth and in heaven many expressions of his complacency. He has a reward for the least token of sympathy shown by his people; and surely their labours for his glory and for the happiness of their fellow-creatures shall not pass unnoticed. The integrity of the good man sometimes subjects him to losses and inconveniences, and is often misrepresented by those who have tried in vain to corrupt it; but then it will be seen how dear it was to God, and he will more than compensate all the sacrifices to which it led, by better blessings than any that earth could furnish. He sees in their services the workings of his Spirit. In the exertions in these games, it was only bodily vigour and agility that was manifested; but in the course of holiness we see the graces of the Saviour. The aged are sometimes ready to think that now their life is a blank, and that in them God sees much for his patience, but nought for his complacency; but God will not despise your patient waiting for your Lord's coming, nor that mild demeanour amidst all your infirmities in which he traces the meekness and gentleness of his Son. The fidelity and affection which prompt an aged servant to do what he can for his master's interest, stamp a value on his slow and feeble efforts which secures to them peculiar approbation.

It is called a crown of righteousness, because it is glory marked by perfect rectitude. The soul and body thus honoured are pure as Christ is pure. There no selfishness ever impedes the movements of benevolence, and there envy never mars the happiness of any one individual, or imbitters that of his neighbour. There no languor ever lowers the swell of devotion, and no fear disturbs that repose into which confidence in God settles the spirit; there no unruly and sensual appetite can harass the soul by its claims, or betray it by its solicitations; and there no evil passion can be excited in the heart. We think with wonder of angels untainted in purity amidst all their intercourse with imperfect beings, and ardent in benevolence, notwithstanding the unworthy returns made to them for their kindness; but the blessed in heaven shall be exposed to no such trials, and, though they were, they could not be corrupted. Moral excellence was by no means necessarily connected with the crowns obtained in the Grecian games. It was to bodily activity, not to virtuous energy, that the prize was due. It might be worn by one who was addicted to evil practices, and who might abuse his honours for the purpose of faction and deceit; but this glory shall be enjoyed by those who behold God's face in righteousness, and shall be reflected on him who remembered them in their low estate, raised them from the dust, set them among princes, and made them inherit the throne of glory.

I may state, as another reason of the title here given to this crown, that it is glory we come to in the way of righteousness. Men often rise to earthly distinc-

tions by the crooked paths of craft and intrigue; and often have they been gained by those whose course to them may be traced in blood. But the path to glory is the way of holiness. It is the head found in the way of righteousness that wears this crown of glory; and no hands can touch this crown but hands washed in innocence. It is by the light and grace of the Holy Spirit that we are taught to set a proper value on this crown, and stirred up to seek it. On a carnal mind its splendour would be lost. This view of the subject will show us the folly of those who speak of men as happy in heaven who, before they died, gave no evidence of the least spirituality in taste or desire. What hath heaven, in all its stores, to suit the carnal mind? or will any change take place, as it enters it, to qualify it for such a state? This present life is the only period in which such a change can be wrought; and death terminates all the means of grace and all the solicitude of mercy. The exercises of holiness are like the previous training of the ancient wrestlers and racers, which, as well as the actual contest itself, was necessary to the gaining of the prize. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

I shall only mention this further reason for this title, that in the bestowal of it God signally manifests his righteousness and truth. He shows his justice in bestowing that felicity his Son hath obtained for his people, and that he is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love which they have showed to his name. Then shall the various promises of it, which have been the support and the joy of the good, be fulfilled; and those who honoured God's faithful-

ness, by believing that it would be bestowed, in opposition to every dark suggestion of the tempter, and of his own despondence, shall glorify it by the testimony they will bear in the actual enjoyment of it, "that not one assurance has failed amidst promises so numerous and so varied." Their accomplishment shall fulfil all their hopes as to certainty, and exceed them as to felicity and glory. "The heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord; thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints." Here the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the righteous have sometimes shaken the faith of men, but then it will be seen that the afflictions of the good had wrought for them an exceeding great and an eternal weight of glory. These crowns are formed of gold purified in the furnace of affliction, and these palms are taken from trees transplanted from the valley of tears.

II. Let us now consider the statement which is here given of Paul's impressions and hopes with regard to this crown.

1. He believed that at present it was laid up for him. It was kept in readiness for him in the treasury of heaven, and under the charge of that Redeemer to whom he had committed his immortal soul and all its interests; and in the power and love of this Guardian he knew that it was perfectly safe. The crowns of earthly kings have been stolen by the thief breaking into the chamber where they were deposited; and often have they been carried away, along with the other spoil of palaces, by successful enemies; but this crown is laid up where moth and rust cannot cor-

rupt, nor thieves break through and steal. The arm which guards it is almighty; the eye which watches over it neither slumbers nor sleeps; and the love which destines it is without variableness, or the least shadow of turning.

But the Apostle had the delightful assurance, that this crown was laid up for him. Is he speaking the language of a vain dreamer? The atheist will say so, for this is his creed, and the practice to which it leads, "that man is like the beasts that perish;" the infidel will say so, for the hand of reason cannot draw aside the veil that separates betwixt us and eternity; and her greatest sages have spoken of futurity in the language of doubt and inquietude; but ye know, Christians, that he speaks language which is warranted by the fullest evidence, and sanctioned by the best principles. It may be said, that the crowns in these games were placed on a table, in the full view of the combatants and spectators, but that this crown is invisible; but can nothing be the object of desire or pursuit but what is evident to the bodily senses? and is there not in the revelation of God such a testimony borne to its reality and excellence as is entitled to win our assent and to excite our ambition? "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Of all the good this testimony is borne,—"That they died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off; and were persuaded of them, and embraced them."*

It will be said, that this assurance might be ex-

* Heb. xi. 13.

pressed by Paul; for he had the peculiar influence of the Spirit of glory. He was caught up to paradise, and saw this crown; but it would be presumption for saints of an ordinary character to use such language. To this it may be replied, that this persuasion is attainable by Christians, in all ages, in the exercise of the graces by which Paul obtained it. His faith in the blood, and his hope in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, led to this conclusion:—He who died to win this crown for me will not withhold it; He who hath given me the earnest of it in the Spirit of glory will not deny it; and He who hath been preparing me for it by the discipline of the cross, and by the means of salvation, will put me in possession of it. And while the Apostle speaks in the text in personal terms of his own assurance, he, in other places of Scripture, represents himself as exercising it along with his fellow Christians,—"We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* This assurance was not his privilege as an Apostle, but as a saint, and it especially blessed his last days. The heir-apparent of an earthly crown may be disappointed of it in a variety of ways, but the hope of glory cherished by the good maketh not ashamed.

2. He expected that the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give it to him at the day of judgment. At death the soul passes into glory, but the full felicity of the believer is reserved till Christ's coming. Then

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

the body shall be raised to share this glory; and many delightful feelings will the soul have from its union with a glorified body, which it cannot have in a separate state. Then also the mystery of God shall be finished, the plans of Providence be brought to their consummation, the number of the elect perfected, and the triumphs of the Saviour complete. From these circumstances such a vast accession must arise to their glory and felicity, that it may, with great propriety, be spoken of as commencing then. These remarks will show you that such passages as our text ought not to be considered as sanctioning the notion of the insensibility of the soul from death till the resurrection, or the doctrine of a middle state, in which departed saints are placed till Christ comes to admit them to heaven. Paul believed that on his departure from this world he should be with Christ; and the highest heaven is the abode of Him whom God hath placed at his own right hand; and in his presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for ever.

The Apostle knew that Christ would come, and that he would act as a righteous judge. The judges in the ancient games might be influenced by partiality, or by prejudice, in their decisions, but no suspicion of injustice can arise respecting his procedure before whom the small and the great shall stand. Sophistry cannot perplex a cause to Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire; and partial counsel cannot influence the heart of Him who is the Holy One and the just.

But did not the Apostle feel that he was a sinner, and how could he think with calmness of a righteous

Judge? To this we reply, that he looked for his mercy in a way perfectly consistent with this character of the Judge. He did not claim this crown as his due in consequence of his toils and virtues, his sufferings and martyrdom, but expected it as a gift. He will give it to me, as if he had said, as a pledge of his love. Much have these hands already conferred, but this they will yet bestow; much have these lips expressed, but to me they will yet say,—"Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The Lord, the righteous Judge, comes, but he comes as the Lord our righteousness. He comes in glory, and the most splendid honours are not too bright for him; but he comes also in love, and I will look for his mercy to eternal life; he comes quickly, but his rewards are with him. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

The wicked can only think calmly of the judgment when they fancy the Judge disposed to be indulgent to human frailties, and reluctant to condemn; but how would such procedure accord with his holy character, and with his appointment by the Father to judge the world in righteousness? and what would angels think of such a scene? But the good, knowing that they shall be found in him, can sing,—"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord; for he cometh, he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the

world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."*

III. It remains that we speak of the character of those who were expected by Paul to share with him in this glory.

1. They are such as love the appearing of Christ. They believe the promise of his coming, and the ends for which he comes; and they show their love to it by their frequent thoughts about it, by maintaining the profession of their faith in it unshaken, by the delay of it, and by the taunts of ungodly men; by their earnest longings and prayers for his appearing; and by the delight with which they dwell on the predictions and promises of it, and with which they inquire for and mark the indications of its approach. Of all the visits friendship ever paid there is none so joyful as the appearing of Christ to the good; and of all the manifestations of mercy none will be so rapturous as when it comes to work its last deliverance, and to put on its heavenly crown.

They love it not only because he will then ransom them from the power of the grave, confess them before his Father and the angels, and call them to his eternal rest, but because of the glory in which he shall be revealed, the manifestations he will give of supreme perfection in the process of judgment, and in the dissolution of the universe, the homage which shall then be paid him by every knee and by every tongue,

* Psalm xcvii. 11—13.

the complacency the Father will express in all his works, in all his wishes, and in all his rewards; and because he will then be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Good men would feel delight in displays of their Saviour's glory from which no advantage was to result to them; but such is the condescension and grace of Christ, that with the displays of his glory their honour and their felicity are connected; and such is the noble and sublime character of Christian principle and feeling, that every benefit is enhanced in value and sweetness, as it is received by the saints, by the lustre with which it exhibits their Redeemer's power and kindness.

2. This is a fit description of those for whom the crown of righteousness is destined. It is to such persons that it is promised: "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin to salvation," and this exercise of theirs is an unequivocal proof of the sincerity and strength of religious principle within them. The profane say in derision, "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the delay of it is employed by the sinner to encourage his heart in licentious indulgence and in cruel oppression. So far from wishing it, he trembles at the idea of it, and labours to exclude it from his thoughts; and when it is forced upon him by the warnings of conscience, or by the power of religious admonition, he thinks of it with horror as the scene in which the Lord of glory, whom he has scorned and hated, will be magnified, in which he shall be called to account for actions in which he despised all control, in which

shame shall cover the most audacious transgressor, in which he shall see all that he delighted in utterly destroyed, and in which every vain hope of his heart shall perish before the wrath of the Lamb. Now, what but the grace of God can form the saints to desires and attachments so opposite to those of the men of the world, to long for that which to them is so hateful, and to prepare for that day which, they wish to persuade themselves, will never arrive? "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."* It is thus only that we can account for the confidence or the dismay with which this event is regarded. When I see the expectation of Christ's coming cheering the mind amidst personal afflictions, and the lowest depression of his cause, animating the virtue which hath no earthly motive to quicken it, and supporting the heart when the comforts which were dear to it are taken away, I cannot but exclaim, "Here is the faith and the patience of the saints!" The good man can say to departing health, thou mayest go; to faithless friends, ye may abandon me; to riches, ye may make yourselves wings and flee away; and to life itself, I can yield you up; for Christ comes, and my life is hid with Him. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, the treasure of my soul, and my portion for ever. When this earth is burnt up and all its works, when the sun is turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, the Christian will be able

* Romans viii. 5.

to rejoice that his portion is undiminished, that his inheritance is safe, and that a happiness not founded on the world cannot perish with it.

3. This part of the text points out to us the benevolent spirit of the Apostle. He rejoiced to think that others would share in this glory as well as himself. No misrepresentation can be more base or groundless, than that which has been sometimes given of the assurance of hope, that it is a selfish principle, and that it conjoins exultation in the ruin of others with confidence in our own felicity. Some represent the Christian in this assurance as saying, "Damnation is for millions, but salvation is for me;" I shall have few companions in happiness and glory, and therefore it will be to me more delightful and honourable. Such horrid feelings the good man's heart neither knows nor cherishes. Such are the feelings only of the children of this world, who, in the career of ambition, will trample down every rival without mercy; who, in the vain show of this life, cannot bear that others should equal them; who would engross, if it were possible, the admiration of every eye; who, in the acquisition of wealth, add house to house, and field to field, that they may dwell alone in the midst of the earth; and who, in the gratification of their appetites, sacrifice what is intrusted to them by others, what is required for the payment of those whom they have employed, and what is necessary for the subsistence of their families. The libertine and the drunkard glory in the character of generosity and goodheartedness; but let insulted creditors and a starving family attest the little claim they have to such appel-

lations, and that they are actuated by the meanest and the grossest selfishness.

But the charity of the gospel teaches us to wish that all people may be saved, and to rejoice that men shall be blessed in Christ, and that all nations shall call him blessed. A good man sees nothing in the prosperity of the wicked to excite his envy; and as to eminence in religion, that is adapted to excite his gratitude, as it is glorifying to God and beneficial to others. It may withdraw the attention of men from piety of an inferior degree and character, but that cannot be the case amidst the perfect light and love of the heavenly state. The splendour of the crowns of others shall not conceal yours, nor shall the fervour of their praise put you to silence. Their portion lessens not mine, nor mine theirs. The greater their glory the more lustre does it reflect on the character of the Redeemer, and the more pleasure it must give to a heart purified from all selfishness and envy. To this liberal spirit the Apostle Paul was early formed, and it shone in the most unfavourable scenes; "Would to God, O king Agrippa," said he when a prisoner, "that not only thou, but all who hear me this day, were altogether such as I am, except these bonds."* And did Paul's generous heart wish even his persecutors as happy as he himself then was, in a spirit and a peace like his own, it need not surprise us that he rejoiced that others should have a crown of righteousness like him. And who can question his sincerity that beholds him enduring all things for the elect's

* Acts xxvi. 29.

sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory; that marks how willing he was to spend and to be spent for the churches; and that hears him saying, "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Never were labours so extensive and zeal more enlarged than his. He travelled, and preached, and wrote, and prayed, and suffered, that salvation might be diffused far and wide, and the more it was known the more he was honoured, the more it was enjoyed the more was he blessed.

CONCLUSION.

Let me exhort those who have such prospects opened to them to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Let not any gloomy forebodings of disastrous events in this life mar this joy. What though the worst should come which imagination or fear present to you, you shall be happy through eternity; and what are the sorrows of time to the glory that shall be revealed! But I will say, that he who will give you the crown of righteousness hereafter will give what is best for you here. That Saviour who said to his disciples before his death, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing?" they said, "Nothing,"—makes this appeal to some aged Christians: When I sent you out in your youth without money and friends to aid and direct you, lacked ye any thing? and they can answer, Thy Providence blessed my industry, and I have been fed with food convenient for me; and he will not leave you comfort-

less in your old age. If age hath its peculiar trials it hath its peculiar consolations.

Live above the world. Let those whose views and hopes are confined to the world be engrossed by its cares and pleasures; but this must accord ill with your prospects. What splendour can this world present to call away your hearts for one moment from the celestial crown? Attachment to riches, and undue solicitude about them, are faults which we have marked with regret in some aged professors of the gospel, and which have been employed by the scoffer to bring discredit on the hope of things eternal, and by the men of the world to justify their entire engrossment with earthly things. Be active in the work of God in every form in which exertion is possible. Travellers in the north of Europe have remarked, that the part of the horizon which was opposite to the point of the sun's setting was tinged with hues as vivid as those which marked the place of his going down; that sky, land, and water seemed to be on fire; and, that long after the sun had set, this appearance continued with an astonishing effulgence of light and colour in the northern part of the hemisphere; and this is an emblem of the bright lustre which piety sheds over the last hours of age, of the beauty with which it exhibits goodness to youth, and of the lively impressions of it which remain in the scenes it has quitted. And since you shall associate for ever with those who love Christ's appearing, and since they shall share in your happiness hereafter, let them share your comforts at present; and let as much as possible of

your time and labour be devoted to the ministrations of mercy. The aged, who have retired from public business, are especially called upon to devote the leisure they now have to the visits of mercy; and in this they will find the best preservative from the languor which would otherwise oppress them, and the best security for that respect and kindness the value of which is so much felt in age.

Let not those who have not this assurance complain of God as unkind to them. Remember that when Paul uttered these words he was closing a career of unexampled toil and suffering in the cause of Christ; and do you expect to be as highly favoured of the Lord as he was at the commencement of your course? God reserves this assurance for you till you are qualified to bear it. It requires the wisdom of age and experience to make a proper use of religious enjoyments. The presumption of youth requires to be kept down. The wise teacher bestows not that applause upon the first successful efforts of a scholar which he gives to those who have risen to eminence in learning by diligent study. Such applause would excite vanity and encourage indolence, when a more sparing measure of it would have been received with gratitude, and would have encouraged application. Bless God that you are not plunged in despair; one hope of heaven however feeble, one glimpse of it however transient, is a mercy for which you ought to be thankful. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."*

* Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

Some of you may have had this assurance, and been deprived of it; but go and seek the Lord weeping over your folly, and asking the way to Zion with your faces thitherward. The glory of this crown is best seen when the eye is filled with the tears of penitence. Let it be your resolution that you will pursue the path of holiness through clouds and darkness. Fear not, only believe. It may be said by some aged Christians, that they have a feebler hope than they once had, and that they can speak with no confidence of attaining this crown. But this despondence is the result of your weakness and infirmity. Mind and body are now become feeble, and in that state circumstances excite alarm which, in vigorous health, would have given you no uneasiness. Resolve that you will hope continually, and you will be upheld in decay, and received to glory by that hand of the Redeemer which is so great in power and so ready in kindness.

Let unconverted men consider that they have no good hope of this crown. You say you expect it, but do you imagine it is attainable by such a course as yours? If Paul, after such a holy and useful life, looked for it as a gift, will you say that you deserve it? Are your merits to be found in your unbelief and impenitence, your selfishness and impiety? Or do you say you hope for it because God is merciful? But he is the righteous Judge, and he will not sacrifice his justice to screen you. He must assign to you the wages of sin. The day of judgment shall be the day of perdition of ungodly men. And will ye brave this fate, and subject yourselves to all that is confounding in the shame, dismal in the gloom, and tormenting in the fire of hell? How imminent is the peril of the aged sinner,

l how afflicting his security! Awake thou that
epest. Repent now of all thy wickedness. Accept
Saviour in all his offices, receive his Spirit in all
fruits, submit to his law in all its requirements.
urn ye, turn ye, why will ye die! "This is the
cord that God hath given to us eternal life; and
is life is in his Son."* Believe this record, accept
is gift, and surrender yourselves to the service of
esus. My earnest desire is that your hearts may now
ield to the grace of religion, and that your hopes
ay now rise to its glory; nor can I wish you a more
oble employment for your life on earth, than the
service of the Lord Jesus; nor a more glorious re-
ward for eternity than this crown of righteousness.
And that redeeming mercy should raise to such a
crown the children of wrath shall be the wonder of
angels and of just men made perfect for ever. For
that redeeming mercy let us now present our grateful
thanksgivings, and with it let us associate all our
hopes. Amen.

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* 1 John v. 11.

THE END.

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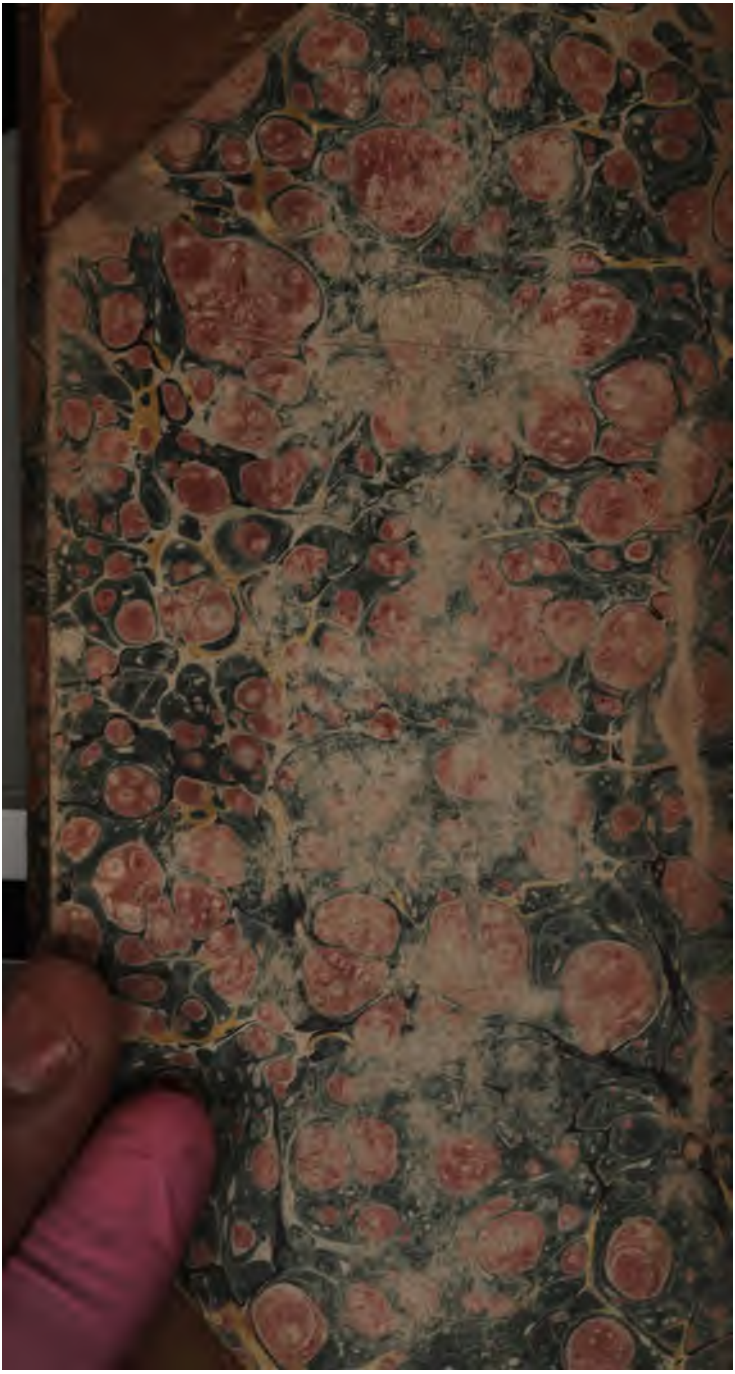
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